3 The Bishop and His World

If the previous chapter was concerned with problems of language, with the words and expressions employed by the poets to identify the bishop as such, in the following chapter I will examine the three main facets of the literary construction of the bishop as put forth by Ephrem and Gregory. First (§3.1), I will consider the complex of functions and relationships with his community that forms the bishop's identity and claim to authority. These can be thematised under three headings—allowing for a good deal of overlap and blurred margins: the bishop as "lover of the poor", hence his social and civic activities (§3.1.1); the bishop as high priest, in his liturgical activities (§3.1.2); and the bishop as teacher and spiritual guide. This last function has been divided for convenience into two subsections, one more concerned with the doctrinal implications of the bishop's function as teacher (§3.1.3), the other with the moral implications (§3.1.4). From these moral implications, the passage to the following theme is particularly smooth: Ephrem and Gregory largely share a positive view of asceticism, and this in turn influences their expectations on the morality of bishops and Christian communities. Therefore, the second part of the chapter (§3.2) will treat the relationship between the episcopate and asceticism as represented by the poets; the theme is of utmost importance during the fourth century, as new ascetic movements rose to prominence, often threatening traditional hierarchy. Finally, the third part (§3.3) is concerned with the thorny issue of bishop selection, another disputed ground during Ephrem's and Gregory's lifetimes, as the importance of bishops grew, and the councils often had to nominate bishops and decide between conflicting claims to dioceses. The results of this inquiry can be summarised as follows: The two poets share the same general views on the episcopate and its functions (both stressing spiritual guidance over liturgical and social activities) and subscribe to a similar strain of asceticism of Syrian origin. However, the poets employ these common concepts in their literary constructions in remarkably different ways, which reflect the poets' different contexts of production and pragmatic aims. Furthermore, Gregory is marked out by his greater interest in intellectual, doctrinal, and educational questions, in a way that betrays the deep influence on his thought of Origen and the Greek pagan tradition.

3.1 Functions of the bishop

Approaching the theme of bishops and the definition of their role and authority in the community, we find a wealth of perspectives one might employ. One could approach the matter with Weber's distinction of traditional, charismatic, and rational authority in mind, or adopt a modified version of this tripartition, as did Rapp with her concepts of

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spiritual, ascetic, and pragmatic authority[1]. A more traditional approach might employ biblical-theological functions, such as kingship, priesthood and prophecy, canonical requirements, or similar distinctions implied by theological reflection[2]. While sociological categories, such as those exemplified by Weber and Rapp, aim at describing the concrete reality of the episcopate, with its differences and articulations, theological categories aim at making sense of the variations of reality, at the same time prescribing behaviours: the former are, so to say, analytic, the latter synthetic. In treating literary texts, however, we face an additional issue: what we try to describe are not facts, but interpretations and perspectives, which are no doubt linked to real facts, but cannot be equated with them. Therefore, the categories we adopt should be literary categories: as literary products are linked to facts, so literary categories have a certain intersection with sociological and theological categories, even without being exactly the same. Hence, previous historical research on the functions and role of the bishops will be of use for this analysis, although its categories will not be used directly.

I have decided to analyse the functions of the bishop described by the poets under three categories, which may be summarised as charity, leadership, and liturgy. The first cue for this partition came from an article by Claudia Rapp on episcopal charity, where two fifth-century hagiographies of bishops, the *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* and the *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza*, are compared. These two biographies have different takes on episcopal charity, since Epiphanius is often described as giving money and food to the poor, even when these donations upset civil or ecclesiastical leaders, while Porphyrius is represented as merciful with pagans and sinners, leading his community through compassion. These two models of charity—"social" and "spiritual," so to speak—have a diachronic distribution, so that the social "lover of the poor" becomes more and more prominent from the fifth century onwards in hagiographies, while spiritual compassion is highlighted mostly in canonical documents of the fourth century such as the Apostolic Constitutions[3]. Furthermore, the two charities relate to two different fields of action for the bishop: mercy was the defining attitude of the bishop when he stood before a penitent Christian, the most praised virtue of the bishop in dealing with his community and its spiritual needs; the love of the poor was the attitude of the Christian community, publicly represented by its bishop, towards society at large, and it related to the material needs of the city. As explained by Rapp, these two spheres are linked in many ways, both in real life and in theological thinking, but it is also interesting that they corre-

1 Weber 1922, 122–176; Rapp 2005, 16–18.

2 See the overview of scholarship at Rapp 2005, 6–16; theological categories are explored by Bou Mansour 2019 and Murray 2006 for the early Syriac church; Gautier 2002, 113–134 uses a threefold division of "sacramental", "doctoral" and "patronal" functions to analyse Gregory's view of priesthood, but their foundation is primarily theological. They more or less correspond to my "liturgy", "leadership" and "charity".

3 Rapp 2009, 77–80.

spond to two different *literary* models of bishop in the genre of hagiography[4]. The lover of the poor and the spiritual counsellor may be compared to common varieties inside a wider and recognised class of literary characters, different species of a genus—like, for example, the different types of *servi* in ancient comedy or the female characters in ancient novels[5]. The literary author employs recognised commonplaces to define his character not only as belonging to a generic social class but also as a type of individuals recurring in that class.

The features of the "lover of the poor" bishop are material charity—as shown, for example in feeding the hungry or freeing prisoners and hostages—and his ability to procure material advantages for the Christian community with his political ability, which may be synthesised under the name of *parrhesia*, the authority and skill to treat with powerful people[6]. The spiritual bishop is defined by his supernatural discernment—namely, his ability to know the heart of his people and treat them with justice, and, most of all, mercy, in order to lead them to God. Under this role of spiritual custody over the community must be included especially the *munus docendi*, the teaching authority and the task of debunking heresy and error. To these two models of episcopal sanctity, we can add a third one, the bishop as worship leader, his role of high priest. In this quality, the bishop is endowed with powerful prayer and, in hagiography at least, eucharistic miracles: these phenomena show another kind of *parrhesia* of the bishop, his direct relationship with God—and his ability to obtain from God what the people need. As worship leader and mediator between God and humans, the bishop must be pure and clean, so that his *parrhesia* flows ultimately from his personal holiness.

Obviously, this threefold distinction is at least partially artificial. It is similar—though not identical—to the threefold office—kingship, prophecy, and priesthood—of traditional theology, and, in the distinction between spiritual guidance and material charity, it partly resembles a distinction assumed by the abundant literature on the expanding jurisdiction of bishops from late antiquity to the Middle Ages[7]—namely, the distinction between a religious and secular jurisdiction of the bishop. However, this distinction between a secular and a spiritual sphere of action is more in our eyes than in the texts: here we should apply the same *caveat* Claudia Rapp used in her distinction between pragmatic and charismatic authority—namely, that pragmatic authority flows from charismatic authority and is still part of a religious worldview[8]. The distinction

4 Rapp 2005, 279–290 for the evolution of the bishop's social and political authority from authority in the Christian congregation as a result of societal change.

5 See, for example: MacCary 1969; Haynes 2003, 101–155; also, the discussion of typification in De Temmerman 2014, 8–14; and of character in De Temmerman/van Emde Boas 2018, 1–23.

6 The fundamental treatment of this category of late antique social interaction is given by Brown 1992, 61–70; 77–78 on the bishop exercising *parrhesia* in connection with his "love of the poor". For a recent history of this ancient category, Leppin 2022.

7 Rapp 2005, 6–12.

8 Rapp 2005, 6, 18, 239, 290.

between material charity and spiritual leadership should be understood more as a distinction between two literary or rhetorical emphases, both rooted in religious values and with spiritual aims, than as two different spheres of jurisdiction. Furthermore, the three models of behaviour seem to correspond to the *munus regendi* (kingship), *docendi* (prophecy), and *sanctificandi* (priesthood), yet the *munus regendi* can describe equally the charitable bishop and the spiritual leader, and even the *munus sanctificandi*, most easily associated with the role of high priest, can be meaningful in describing the spiritual care of a bishop. Furthermore, under the umbrella of "spiritual leadership" fall two different problems the bishop will face—namely, doctrinal error and moral fault[9]: granted that they are united by the fact that the bishop should teach or guide his congregation, sometimes with the same means in both cases, they are nevertheless two different problems, which summon different themes, such as that of formation and culture in the case of doctrinal error and that of mercy and penance in the case of moral fault.

Finally, the distinction between these three models should not be read too rigidly, since in most cases they are just three facets of one coherent conception of the episcopate, and each text may choose to highlight this or that facet in order to make its point. In this, they are similar to the "ideal-types" of authority formulated by Weber: they are never met in their pure form in practice; every literary bishop—just like every historical authority—has *some* elements which *approximate* to this or that type[10]. Such categories are then above all useful heuristic concepts, but the literary portrait of a bishop can be evaluated only a posteriori, after the text has been properly interpreted in its rhetorical mechanisms and artistic choices. In this perspective, the comparison of passages from different texts on the basis of a common literary theme may help us assess the differences and peculiarities in the treatment of these features, which were in some way or other part of the audience's expectations.

3.1.1 Lover of the poor

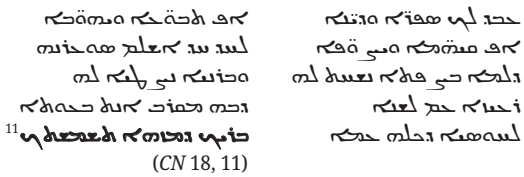
In their broadest lines, Gregory's and Ephrem's approaches to the role of the bishop are similar, though the poets play out the details differently. For both authors, material charity and political skills seem to be the least important features of the ideal bishop. They clearly focus on spiritual guidance, and only in relation to it do they consider the other actions the bishop may pursue. However, the relationship between spiritual guidance and other actions develops in different ways. In this section I begin by analysing the text passages in which the two poets downplay material charity through the suggestion to delegate its tasks to people other than the bishop (§3.1.1.1). Then, I will differentiate between the two poets. First (§3.1.1.2), I will consider Ephrem, as he limits

9 Same distinction at Gautier 2002, 118.
10 Weber 1922, 124.

material charity and its rhetorical commonplaces to one bishop, Babu, thereby employing this episcopal trait more as a characterising device than as a generalised theological object. Furthermore, briefer references to the concept can be traced back to the bishop's role in guiding the community and in his priestly prerogatives. My treatment of Gregory (§3.1.1.3) will begin with a passing reference to material charity, which serves to criticise the election of Nectarius. Then I will analyse his handling of the complex and much more important theme of *parrhesia*—namely, the issue of how the bishop should relate to secular power. This theme, introduced here for the first time prominently, will emerge several times in the remainder of this chapter.

3.1.1.1 A task to be delegated

From the paucity of the poets' remarks on material charity, the reader can deduce that they ascribed little importance the practice of this virtue as an episcopal task. Gregory discusses the question in only one instance, while Ephrem alludes to it multiple times, but only in passing and, we shall see, with strong limitations. Furthermore, both poets wrote a passage proposing delegation of practical tasks to other figures:



(*CN* 18, 11)

Ἓν ἔστω τοῦδ' ἔργον ἱερέως καὶ μόνον,
Ψυχὰς καθαίρειν ἐν βίῳ τε καὶ λόγῳ,
Ἄνω φέροντα ἐνθέοις κινήμασι,
– Γαληνὸν, ὑψίνουν τε τὰς θείας μόνας
Ἀκηλιδώτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον, (755)
Ὥσπερ κάτοπτρον ἔνδοθεν μορφούμενον –
Ἁγνάς τε πέμπειν προσφορὰς ὑπὲρ τέκνων,
Ἕως ἂν αὐτοὺς προσφορὰν καταρτίσῃ.
Τὰ δ' ἄλλ' ἀφείσθω τοῖς τάδ' ἐντελεστέροις.
Οὕτως ἂν ἡμῖν ἀσφαλῶς ἔχοι βίος. (760)
(II, 1, 12, 751–760)

Leave to the priest one task and one only,
to purify souls through life and words,
bringing them upwards with inspired impulses,
being gentle and high-minded, only by the divine,

11 "Make thee judges and officers, / gatherers and givers, too, // and patrons and supporters, / all giving their service to each other, // lest may be rusted by care, / or defiled by anxiety, // the mind and the tongue / by which you offer the intercession // propitiating for the whole community. / **Blessed is he who makes your worship shine!**"

spotless reflections moulded, (755)
as a mirror reflecting from within,
and to send pure offerings on behalf of his children,
until he has restored them as an offering.
Let other tasks be left for the ones more accomplished in them.
This way, we can have a secure life. (760)

These two passages are strikingly similar. They both propose to delegate practical tasks to figures other than the bishop, and they both justify this idea with the language of priesthood and purity. Note that both passages are appended to an important declaration of the proper role of the bishop: lines 759–760 of Gregory's poem follow his delineation of the priest's unique task (see §3.1.1.3), while stanza 11 of Ephrem's *CN* 18 precedes a stanza (12) where the poet links ritual and moral purity with the definition (*kunnāyā*, *CN* 18, 12, 5) of priest as the "mediator" between human beings and God (again, §3.1.1.3). As for the context in which these declarations are found, it is naturally different, since Ephrem comes to the declaration at stanza 12 after three stanzas of advice (9–11) to the newly accessed bishop, the third part of a poem whose first part defended the choice of the new bishop (stanzas 1–4) and whose middle part related his success in defeating Julian (stanzas 5–8), while Gregory is discussing the contemporary practice of electing someone who is a successful politician, even though inexperienced in matters of religion, to the episcopal throne (part of the discussion is analysed at §3.1.2.3). Even if the aim is different (advice and polemics), the meaning of the passages is the same: at the same time as they clearly define *what* a bishop is, the poets explicitly exclude all tasks and activities that are only contingent and should therefore be delegated to someone else. In fact, these tasks are not only outside the scope of the bishop, but they are outright damaging to his proper activities. Ephrem is very clear in this respect, as he describes the thoughts and preoccupations of these tasks "rusting" (*'ašḥet*) and "defiling" (*'eṣṭayyē*) the bishop in his priestly quality. The verbs he chooses for this impurity do not have much biblical attestation; however, the root of *'eṣṭayyē*, *ṣ-y-y*, is used for the "filthy garments" of Joshua in Zechariah's vision (Zach. 3:3–4), a passage in which Joshua is characterised as *kāhnā rabbā*, "high priest" (3:1). Moreover, the verb "to make shine" (*zahher*) in line 10, which also means "to cleanse, purify", is employed of Moses's shining face in and around Ex. 34:29, another passage with priestly themes. The image of "rust", though not present in the Bible, adds to the idea of ritual impurity that of clumsiness and inefficiency. With these words, Ephrem makes clear that he is describing a situation in which the bishop is impeded from accomplishing his priestly tasks. The causes of this impediment are "care" (*ṣeptā*) and "anxiety" (*renyā*). Also, Gregory indirectly states that the practical tasks of the bishop, most of all because of their moral and psychological impact, prohibit a proper discharge of the priestly office, as Old Testament ritual impurity prevented the priests from sacrificing: Gregory expresses this through the sacrificial language of lines 751–758 and through the image of the mirror, suggesting that the bishop's attention should be directed only towards God (and, consequently, away from earthly things).

The care and anxiety that Gregory and Ephrem associate with the material tasks of the bishop were a literary commonplace, one of the components of the "refusal of office" trope, but it is likely that, at least in important cities, the commonplace corresponded to reality[12]. A similar idea had been used by Constantine to justify exempting clergymen from liturgies (that is, taxes)[13]. Perhaps the insistence of Gregory and Ephrem on an episcopate free of worldly administration responded to critics of similar exemptions from civic duties: if the bishop was exempted from civic liturgies to be fully devoted to religion, it would have seemed inconsistent for the same bishop to manage much wealth and to pass his time doing what an ordinary civic notable would do.

Gregory is very generic and does not in this passage point to the tasks that do not deserve the attention of the bishop, using simply the word τὰ ἄλλα, "the rest" and describing the bishop's delegates as τοῖς ἐντελεστέροις, "those more competent". Ephrem is more specific, giving titles to the delegates of the bishop. These are divided into three couples: "scribes" and "judges" (*sāprē w-dayyānē*), "gatherers" and "givers" (*tābō'ē w-yāhōbē*), and "patrons" and "supporters" (*qāyōmē w-yāṣōpē*). Bou Mansour interprets some of these names, while others remain too vague for us to grasp. *Sāprē*, literally "scribes", is, in his mind, "theologians," and upon "judges" he offers no clarification. The *tābō'ē* are glossed as "fundraisers", while *qāyōmē* and *yāṣōpē* are linked to administrative tasks, with the *qāyōmē* more specifically associated with the role of the *oikonomos*[14].

Beck, too, reads *sāprē* as "theologians," supporting this reading with parallel texts, as he rejects Bickell's translation of the term as *legisperitos*[15]. Both Beck and Bou Mansour

12 De Salvo 2010, 183 (with sources); Haensch 2007, 162–171. In the case of Nisibis, the importance of the city was perhaps compounded with the difficult situation due to the Persian sieges. Ephrem does not draw clearly this link, but laments profusely in the poems on bishops, and especially at *CN* 21, the devastations of war (see §4.1.2).

13 διόπερ ἐκείνους τοὺς εἴσω τῆς ἐπαρχίας τῆς σοι πεπιστευμένης ἐν τῇ καθολικῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἥ Καικιλιανὸς ἐφέστηκεν, τὴν ἐξ αὐτῶν ὑπηρεσίαν τῇ ἁγίᾳ ταύτῃ θρῃσκείᾳ παρέχοντας, οὕσπερ κληρικοὺς ἐπονομάζειν εἰώθασιν, ἀπὸ πάντων ἅπαξ ἁπλῶς τῶν λειτουργιῶν βούλομαι ἀλειτουργήτους διαφυλαχθῆναι, ὅπως μὴ διά τινος πλάνης ἢ ἐξολισθήσεως ἱεροσύλου ἀπὸ τῆς θεραπείας τῆς τῇ θειότητι ὀφειλομένης ἀφέλκωνται, ἀλλὰ μᾶλλον ἄνευ τινὸς ἐνοχλήσεως τῷ ἰδίῳ νόμῳ ἐξυπηρετῶνται (Eus. *h. e.* 10, 7, 2).

14 Bou Mansour 2019, 453 with n. 222. An overview of the personal dependent from the bishop in this period is given by Sotinel 1998; Haensch 2007. If we were to map the Latin names given in that contributes onto Ephrem's list, *sāprē* would probably correspond to the *notarii* or the *defensores*, i.e., secretaries and lawyers; *dayyānē* to *defensores*; *yāṣōpē* to the *curatores*, people charged with the supervision of euergetic projects; the *qāyōmē* to the *oikonomoi*; since in this period the church is still dependent on her wealthy patrons, they got a say in the administration of the resources they donated (Sotinel 1998, 120–121), a reality to which the name *yāhōbē* may point. However, it is far from certain that these correspondences between distant parts of the empire are to be accepted.

15 Beck 1961, 60n22. The three passages referred to by Beck are *CN* 19, 16, 7; *hymn. fid.* 51, 4, 7 and *hymn. haer.* 22, 21, 3. As regards *hymn. fid.* 51, *sāprē* is parallel to *ḥakkīmē* "wise men", and both terms are employed to connote negatively heretics: they belong to the wider language of Ephrem's anti-intellectualistic rhetoric aimed at non-Nicene Christians. In this sense, *sāprā* here is a generic term for a learned person, who cannot be reduced to "theologians", as this was a definite category in Ephrem's time. These words denote, much more than a subject of study (theology), an intellectualistic approach to

failed to recognise that *CN* 18, 11, 1 is a quote from Dtn. 16:18 ("Judges and officers shalt thou make thee"), which I have instead translated accordingly[16]. This means that Ephrem is drawing an implicit parallelism between the episcopate and the political organisation described at Dtn. 16 (and in the following chapters). Two elements of this biblical organisation may have prompted the parallelism. First, the organisation has its basic unity in the city (Dtn. 16:18), in this resembling the episcopate. Second, and more important, these biblical authorities are clearly endowed with judicial powers (Dtn. 16:19; 17:9–11). This means that the doctrinal or educational task implied by Beck's and Bou Mansour's interpretation of the term is out of place here. The combination of *sāprē* and *dayyānē* is meant to help the bishop in his role as adjudicator in the community. Moreover, Beck himself notes that the word *dayyānē* is evidence that bishops in Nisibis already had a jurisdiction on civil causes that was recognised by the state[17]. Indeed, the task of settling disputes among Christians had been part of the bishop's ministry since at least the third century. This task was presented as a facet of the bishop's spiritual guidance, in connection with his responsibility over excommunication, penance and readmission into the community, and over salvation of as many souls as possible[18]. This juridical task does enter imperial legislation at the beginning of the fourth century—which would agree with Beck's idea of a state recognition of the bishop's judgement—but more recent studies downsize the extent and degree of such a recognition[19]. One could object that Ephrem's suggestion that the bishop delegate juridical duties is a sign of the "secularisation" of this task, which was no longer perceived as part of the spiritual guidance of the bishop, but of his more mundane activities, often linked with the social standing of the individual prelate. There would be a measure of truth in such an objection, to which another element may be added: in the course of the fourth century, as the number of Christians grew, as the episco-

God. At *CN* 19, 16, 7, bishop Valgash is called *sāpar-nāmōsā* "scribe of the law", the same expression as that employed by the Peshitta for Ezra at Esr. 7:12. This title is a reference to Valgash's skill in teaching, homiletics and Bible interpretation (see below, §3.1.1.3). It is true that this entails much of what we would call "theology", but the term has implications on Valgash's role in the community which exceed the term "theologian", such as his episcopal role of adjudicator for controversies among the faithful, so that the word *sāpar-nāmōsā* may preserve also a legal tinge in this context. The most meaningful parallel however is *hymn. haer.* 22, 21, because the term *sāprā* appears here in a series of official titles: the "leaders" (*rēšē*), namely bishops, "priests" (*qaššīšē*), "deacons" (*šammāšē*), "scribes" and "readers" (*sāprē w-qārōyē*) and finally the "covenant" (*qyāmā*), i.e., the group of lay ascetics typical of fourth-century Syria. Yet, of all these terms, the only one which has not an official standing is *sāprā*, since it does not appear as a title outside the Bible until the *Chronicle of Edessa* (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2708, *s.v.* ܣܦܪܐ), and in that case it refers to secular civic notaries.

16 *Dayyānē w-sāprē 'bad l-āk* (Dtn. 16:18, Peshitta version); *'bad l-āk sāprē w-dayyānē* (*CN* 18, 11, 1).

17 Beck 1961, 60n22. On fourth-century legislation concerning *episcopalis audientia*: Rapp 2005, 242–252 and the bibliography at Haensch 2007, 162n35.

18 Key texts for this idea are found at *Const. apost.* 2, 37–54, a Greek text of Syrian provenance, largely borrowing from the *Didasc. apost.* 9–11, another originally Greek text, but today available only in Syriac translation. This means that these texts could have been known to both Gregory and Ephrem.

19 Humfress 2011; Rapp 2005, 242–252.

pate attracted more important people, and as the prestige of the church increased, more people would have appealed to the bishop's court, significantly increasing the labour required of the bishop[20]. Thus, not only the day-to-day reality of the causes brought to the bishop but also the amount of time they subtracted from seemingly more spiritual tasks may have prompted Ephrem to represent arbitration and adjudication as secondary tasks, which the bishop may delegate to others. After all, Epiphanius of Salamis delegated the task to one of his deacons for this reason, and the assistance of deacons or priests had been required since the *Didascalia apostolorum*, so that one could also guess that it is deacons and priests that are meant under the nouns *sāprē* and *dayyānē*[21].

Grammatically, *tābōʿē w-yāhōbē* are two *nomina agentis* derived from a verb. *Yāhōbā* (in the singular) is a very generic term, used in many contexts with the simple meaning of "giver", "one who gives", "donor"[22]. As far as I can tell, the word does not appear in the Bible together with *tābōʿā*. So, while the combination of *sāprē* and *dayyānē*, though quite generic in meaning, was precisely connoted by its biblical precedent, in the case of *tābōʿē w-yāhōbē* we are left with names too generic to be formal titles—unless they were used as formal titles in Ephrem's community, a usage which would have left no other trace and which is consequently unlikely[23]. *Tābōʿā* comes from the verb *tbaʿ*, meaning "to seek out", "to demand," and was employed most of all for "to seek revenge" and "to demand redress". Therefore, *tābōʿā* is someone who seeks redress or revenge, often in an official capacity. The term can be applied to two fields: on one side, *tābōʿā* is someone seeking to punish, hence a judge, an avenger, or even an inquirer; on the other, it may be applied to the economic field, and then it means "exactor", whether it be for a private party (a "creditor") or for the state (as "tax-collector")[24]. In this context, I find it more likely that the term refers to the financial field, as opposed to the juridical, because the judicial activities of the church are already covered by the "scribes and judges," and *yāhōbē* seems to point to donations to the church[25]. Therefore, if the first pair of delegates substi-

20 Witnesses in this regard can be found in Ambrose and Augustine: Aug. *ep.* 33; Possid. *vit. Aug.* 19; on Ambrose see Aug. *conf.* 6, 1, 3; Selb 1967, 214–217; Haensch 2007, 163 with nn. 37–39 for primary sources.

21 *Const. apost.*=*Didasc. apost.* 2, 42 (bishop and deacons to judge together); 44, 3 (the deacon should order everything he can, leave the rest to the bishop); 46 (bishop and priests to judge together); *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis* PG 41, 93A. More on assistance to the bishop in adjudicating at Haensch 2007, 164–165; at 166–167 a brief discussion of *notarii* attached to a bishop, who could also serve different purposes beside juridical ones.

22 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1567, *s.v.* ܬܒܥ.

23 Yet, note that Aphrahat, *dem.* 20, 19 employs *yāhōbē* in relation to the giving of alms with a turn of phrase that might suggest a technical sense: "This short meditation I wrote for you on the giving to the poor (*mawhbat meskinē*). Encourage and persuade the givers (*l-yāhōbē*) to sow before themselves the seed of life, as it is written . . .". If Aphrahat's addressee is a bishop, the idea of a group of "givers" led by the prelate could be defended with this text.

24 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4382, *s.v.* ܟܬܒ.

25 Hence, on this interpretation I agree with Bou Mansour 2019, 453 with n. 222.

tuted for the bishop in his capacity of arbitrator, this second pair would help him secure revenues for the church either by firsthand donations (*yāhōbē*) or by requesting, organizing, and eventually asserting the church's rights over the donations of others (*tābōʿā*).

The third pair, *qāyōmē w-yāṣōpē*, has the same morphological structure of the *nomina agentis* as the nouns in the second. *Qāyōmē* comes from the very common verb *qām*, roughly corresponding to Greek ἵστημι, and encapsulates the same concepts of Greek derivatives of ἵστημι such as προστάτης and ἐπιστάτης: the concept of control and guidance over some subjects; of protection of those subjects; and of dependence of this role on a higher power—that is, delegation. Indeed, the term in the Peshitta corresponds to Greek προστάτης, ἐπιστάτης, and ἐπίσκοπος, while elsewhere it is employed for the late antique *patronus*[26]. A similar meaning is attached to the other word, *yāṣōpā*, from the verb *yiṣep*, "to care", "to worry about", "to strive to"[27]. In this semantic family, the sense of delegation and protection is more stressed than that of control and guidance. In one instance (1Macc. 14:47), *yāṣōpā* translates Greek προστατέω, which demonstrates the link of *yāṣōpā* with asymmetrical relationships similar to patronage, since the context is Simon Maccabeus's command over the whole people of Judah. Bou Mansour, in a note, associates the *qāyōmē* with the role of *oikonomos*, reserving for the *yāṣōpē* a more generic administration, but he does not give a reason for this differentiating. Given the similarity of the terms, one is led to doubt that there should be any difference between the two categories: Ephrem may be employing a hendiadys to preserve the parallelism with the other pairs. Apart from their individual meaning, it is still far from clear in which tasks should these figures help the bishop. One can surmise a directing or administering activity, perhaps of the goods acquired through the "donors" and "exactors" of line 2, but it cannot be excluded that these ministers organised some activities of the community either[28]. It is noteworthy that Ephrem proposes to differentiate the bishop from the patron in the same context in which he describes the priestly function of the bishop, because the same discourse was developed by Gregory (§3.1.1.3 and §3.1.2.3): it is in the context of the rejection of the bishop-patron or bishop-politician (II, 1, 12, 709–750) that Gregory explains the priestly task of the bishop (II, 1, 12, 751–760).

To sum up, both Ephrem and Gregory describe the episcopate, in its most proper and most narrow sense, as a priestly mediation between human beings and God. Priestly state, according to the Old Testament, requires purity: Ephrem and Gregory interpret purity in a moral and psychological sense, as concentration on God and absence of other cares. Therefore, they propose to separate some prerogatives from the immediate jurisdiction of the bishop through delegation. Ephrem specifies which prerogatives should be delegated: the bishop's task of arbitration, the securing of resources, and the administration. Gregory implies something similar when (II, 1, 12, 709–762) he criticises

26 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3532, *s.v.* ܨܝܡܐ.

27 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1617, *s.v.* ܨܝ ܦ.

28 For an overview on the *oikonomoi* and other delegates to the administration of church finances see Haensch 2007, 166–171.

those who prefer a politician as bishop to an ascetic. Even though the claim is similar, it has different functions in the texts of Ephrem and Gregory. In the case of Gregory, his definition of the “proper” tasks of the bishop is consistent not only with his theology but also with his apology as bishop of Constantinople against Nectarius.

At first sight, Ephrem’s motivation is not apparent. However, *CN* 18, 3–4 seems to defend Abraham from the envy of other clergymen and the accusation of being too young to be a bishop:

3 ܚܠܝܐ ܐܚܪܝܐ ܕܪܒ   ܘܗܘܐ ܪܫܐ ܠܗܕ̈ܡܘܗܝ
ܙܥܘܪܐ ܕܢܣܒ ܒܘܟܪܘܬܐ   ܠܐ ܒܕ̈ܡܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܝܥܩܘܒ
ܘܠܐ ܒܛܢܢܐ ܐܝܟ ܐܗܪܘܢ   ܕܛܢܘ ܒܗ ܐܚܘ̈ܗܝ ܠܘܝ̈ܐ
ܒܚܘܒܐ ܢܣܒܗ ܐܝܟ ܡܘܫܐ   ܒܪ ܡܫܚܐ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܐܗܪܘܢ
ܚܕܝܘ ܒܟ ܐܚ̈ܝܟ ܐܟܘܬܗ   **ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܓܒܟ ܒܫܘܝܘܬܐ**

4 ܠܝܬ ܚܣܡܐ ܘܛܢܢܐ   ܒܝܬ ܗܕ̈ܡܐ ܕܒܓܘܫܡܐ
ܕܒܚܘܒܐ ܠܗ ܡܫܬܡܥܝܢ   ܒܪ̈ܚܡܐ ܡܢܗ ܡܬܦܩܕܝܢ
ܕܘܩܐ ܗܘ ܪܫܐ ܠܗܕ̈ܡܐ   ܕܠܟܠ ܦܢ̈ܝܢ ܗܘ ܚܐܪ
ܪܡ ܗܘ ܘܡܟܝܟ ܒܚܢܢܗ ܥܕܡܐ   ܠܥܩ̈ܒܐ ܡܬܬܚܬܐ
ܕܢܣܒ ܡܢܗܘܢ ܚܫܐ   **ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܚܘܒܟ ܡܙܓ ܠܢ**[29]
(*CN* 18, 3–4)

Stanza 3 says that the new bishop was elected with a large consensus for his merits (“he was older than Aaron”, meaning he was wiser) and despite his age (“the little”). The idea of the youngest son acquiring the primogeniture refers clearly to David (1Sam. 16:11–13), with whom Abraham is compared also at *CN* 18, 6, 3, and again for his young accession at *CN* 19, 2, 3[30]. The following stanza (*CN* 18, 4), already analysed at §2.1.1.2, denies that there was any envy (*ḥsāmā wa-ṭnānā*) around Abraham’s election, a claim repeated also at *CN* 19, 9, 1 (“no one envied your election”, *layt d-ḥāsem ba-gbīt-āk*). This insistence betrays a situation less idyllic than that which Ephrem represents[31]. In such a context, Ephrem may suggest delegating some tasks in order to appease those who were discontented because of the election and to reassure those concerned with the young age of the bishop: diverting these tasks from the young bishop would create more opportunities for those who were excluded from the election and would likely lead to the entrusting of delicate matters to people more experienced than Abraham.

---

[29] “The last musterer, who was lifted / and became head of his limbs [*rēšā l-haddām-aw*(*hī*)] // the little who took primogeniture, / not at a price like Jacob, // nor through jealousy like Aaron, / envied by his brothers, the Levites, // but through love [*b-ḥubbā*] took it, like Moses, / because he was older than Aaron: // your brothers rejoiced in you as Moses. / **Blessed is he who chose you through concord!** /// **4.** There isn’t jealousy nor envy / among the limbs in the body [*bēt-haddāmē da-b-gušmā*], // for they obey it for love [*b-ḥubbā*], / they are ordered by it for affection [*b-raḥmē*]: // the head is the limbs’ watchman [*dawqa-*(*h*)*w rēšā l-haddāmē*], / for he can see all parts; // though exalted, he is humble for love [*ba- ḥnānā*], / he stoops even to the feet, // to take away their pain./ **Blessed is he who joined your love with us!”**

[30] See also *CN* 17, 2, 7–8 and *CN* 19, 2, 4 for the image of the horn of anointment: §3.3.1.1 n. 321.

[31] See also Palmer 1998, 124–125, with his customary cynicism.

3.1.1.2 The limits of charity in Ephrem

Delegation is only one facet of Ephrem's and Gregory's approach to episcopal charity. Tasks and values connected with it are mentioned elsewhere in the poems, although here the poets follow different paths. Ephrem treats the theme differently in the poems on Valgash (*CN* 13–16) and in those on Abraham (17–21). In the poems on Valgash, Ephrem employs episcopal charity as an element in his framing of the history of Nisibis as a development through phases defined by the three first bishops. In order to differentiate the bishops—and the phases they define—Ephrem highlights always the same qualities for each bishop:

16
ܩܕܡܝܐ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܥܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܩܕܡ ܥܠ ܥܠܡܐ ܩܕܡ ܥܠ ܥܠܡܐ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ

17
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ[32]
(*CN* 13, 16–17)

2
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ

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ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
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4
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ
ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ ܩܕܡ[33]
…

32 "Against the first wrath / fought the toil [*ʿaml-eh*] of the first; // against the sultriness at midday / stood the shade of the middle; // against the ungrateful peace / multiplied the last his warnings [*zuhhārā*]. /// To the first siege resisted / the first, triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest; // to the second siege resisted / the second merciful [*raḥmānā*] priest; // the prayers of the last, then, / mystically [*kasyāʾīt*] closed our breaches."

33 "The good toil [*ʿaml-eh*] of the first / bound the land up in her distress; // the bread and wine [*laḥm-eh w-ḥamr-eh*] of the middle / cured the city in her ruin; // sweetened our bitterness in distress / the sweet talk [*maml-eh*] of the last. /// The first tilled the earth with toil [*ʿamlā*], / uprooting thence briar and thorns, // the middle enclosed her all around, / making her a hedge of redeemed [*prīqē*], // the last opened the barn of his Master / and sowed in her the words of her Master [*mellay mār-āh*] /// The first priest by hand of fasting [*ṣawmā*] / had closed the gates of the mouths, // the second priest with the prisoners [*šabyē*] / had opened the mouth of the purses, // now the last has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life [*ḥešlat-ḥayyē*]."

23 ܡܐ ܕܡܛܝܐ ܠܗ̇ ܠܥܬܝܪܐ ܡܚܘܝܐ ܓܙܗ ܕܩܕܡܝܐ
ܡܐ ܕܡܛܝܐ ܠܗ̇ ܠܦܪܘܩܐ ܡܚܘܝܐ ܦܪ̈ܝܩܐ ܕܡܨܥܝܐ
ܡܐ ܕܡܛܝܐ ܠܗ̇ ܠܦܪܘܩܐ ܡܚܘܝܐ ܡܫܚܐ ܕܢܗܝܪ̈ܘܗܝ

24 ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܦܪܥ ܠܠܐܝ̈ܐ ܡܩܪܒܐ ܥܡܠܗ ܕܩܕܡܝܐ
ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܪܚܡ ܝܗܘ̈ܒܐ ܡܩܪܒܐ ܙܕܩܗ ܕܡܨܥܝܐ
ܩܕܡ ܗܘ ܕܐܢ ܝܘ̈ܠܦܢܐ ܡܩܪܒܐ ܕܪܫܗ ܕܐܚܪܝܐ[34]
(*CN* 14, 2–4; 23–24)

The theme is reprised briefly in the form of advice to Abraham later:

ܟܗܢܐ ܝܥܩܘܒ ܢܨܝܚܐ ܥܡܗ ܢܨܚܬ ܐܟܘܬܗ
ܕܐܘܣܦ ܚܘܒܗ ܠܛܢܢܗ ܕܚܠܬܐ ܘܚܘܒܐ ܐܬܥܛܦܬ
ܒܒܒܘ ܪܚܡ ܙܕܩ̈ܬܐ ܒܟܣܦܐ ܦܪܩܬ ܠܫܒܝ̈ܐ
ܒܘܠܓܫ ܣܦܪ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܠܒܗ̇ ܦܬܚܬ ܠܟܬܒ̈ܐ
ܒܟ ܕܝܢ ܢܣܓܐ ܥܘܕܪܢܗ̇ ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܐܘܪܒ ܠܬܓܪ̈ܝܗ̇[35]
(*CN* 19, 16)

The terms employed in *CN* 13 and *CN* 14, 2–3 and 23–24 are still vague. Jacob, the first bishop, is consistently associated with the word "toil", "work" (*ʿamlā*), and described with the adjective *naṣṣīḥā*, with a wide range of meanings, spanning from "bright", "shining", to "victorious" and "famous"[36]. These characteristics, repeated in *CN* 19, 16, can be interpreted as pointing at Jacob's strict asceticism, as manifested by his fasting (*ṣawmā*) in *CN* 14, 4 (see below, §3.1.2). The features of Babu and Valgash, the second and third bishops, are more shifting, but it seems safe to say that Valgash is associated with preaching and teaching, while Babu is associated with charity and "redemption", expressed with nouns coming from the root *p-r-q* (the passive participle *prīqē* and the *nomen agentis pārōqā*). These three portraits are projected onto the historical past of Nisibis, being associated with the sieges in *CN* 13, 16–17, and they are again projected onto the eschatological future of Nisibis—as the church "reaches out to meet the Groom", an eschatological image taken from the parable of the ten virgins—in *CN* 14, 23–24. So the eschatological Christ is presented with different titles and attributes matching the feature of the single bishop: with toiling and ascetically poor Jacob, he

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[34] "As she comes to the Rich [*ʿattīrā*], / she shows the treasure [*gazz-eh*] of the first; // as she comes to the Redeemer [*pārōqā*], / she shows those redeemed [*prīqē*] by the middle; // as she reaches out to meet the Groom / she shows the anointment of his luminaries. /// Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she brings the labour [*ʿaml-eh*] of the first; // before the One loving the bountiful [*rāḥem yāhōbē*], / she brings the alms [*zedq-eh*] of the middle; // before the One judging the doctrines [*dāyen yullpānē*], / she brings the debating [*drāš-eh*] of the last."

[35] "Like the triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest Jacob, / with him she triumphed [*nṣaḥt*] like him; // since he joined his love to his zeal, / she put on fear and love. // Through Babu, loving almsgiving [*rāḥem zedqātā*], / with money she ransomed the prisoners [*praqt l-šabyē*], // through Valgash, learned in the Law [*sāper-nāmōsā*], / she opened her heart to Scriptures, // through you then may her benefit increase! / **Blessed is he who extolled her merchants!**"

[36] Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2438–2439, *s.v.* ܢܨܝܚܐ.

"rewards the wearied" (*CN* 14, 24, 1) and is "rich" (*CN* 14, 23, 1); with charitable and redeeming Babu, he is the "lover of those who give" (*CN* 14, 24, 3) and the "redeemer" (*CN* 14, 23, 3), and with learned and eloquent Valgash, he "judges doctrines" (*CN* 14, 24, 5). More on this relationship between different bishops and time will be said at §4.1.

More substantial information on Babu and Valgash is given in *CN* 19, 16, where Ephrem makes clear that Valgash's distinguishing achievement had been his teaching, in particular his teaching of Scripture, and Babu's defining deed had been his ransoming (*praq*) some prisoners, indicating a broader engagement in collecting and employing alms (*zedqātā*). This clarifies also *CN* 14, 4, 3–4 where it is said that Babu, through the prisoners—namely, by proposing to the community that it ransom the prisoners—had "opened the mouth of the purses"—that is, he had persuaded the faithful to give alms. The same activities are hinted at by the epithet *raḥmānā*, from the same root—*r-ḥ-m*—that forms the name *mraḥḥmānutā*, one of the terms for "charity" and "almsgiving" in Syriac[37]. One is even led to suspect that the text has lost an *m-* and that the original had *mraḥḥmānā*, meaning "merciful", but also "almsgiver", "benefactor", which is metrically equivalent to *raḥmānā*. Furthermore, the shadow (*CN* 13, 16, 4) and the bread and wine (*CN* 14, 2, 3) associated with Babu are standard biblical images for God's protection and favour[38]. Naturally, bread and wine also recall the Eucharist, which would seem to depart from Babu's image as "social saint", if the Eucharist were not a theological model for Christian charity and solidarity[39].

The prominence Babu gives to the ransoming of captives is remarkable because it agrees with many other sources, already from the third century, which task the bishop with this particular duty[40]. Furthermore, in many cases this duty allowed bishops to break away from or limit the influence of wealthy lay donors; for example, Ambrose melted liturgical silverware donated by wealthy laymen linked with his Arian predecessor, in order to ransom captives in the Balkans, thereby effectively erasing the memory of the donors while at the same time using their wealth to increase his own prestige[41]. Ephrem's vivid formulation of Babu's accomplishment—"with the prisoners / had opened the mouth of the purses" (*CN* 14, 4, 3–4)—may hint at a similar process, in that Babu is credited with the ransoming of captives even though the money probably came from lay donors. In any case, such a formulation is in agreement with a wider tendency of the church in the whole empire, to regard the bishop as the centre of Christian charity, compelling all other actors (laymen, but also priests and countryside communities) to have their offerings mediated by the bishop[42]. The ransom puts the

37 See Aphrahat *dem.* 20, 19, where "lover of the poor" is spelled *rāḥem l-meskēnē*.

38 Ryken/Wilhoit/Longman 1998, 434–438, *s.vv.* "Bread"; 2620–2623, "Shadow"; 3201–3204, "Wine".

39 Brown 2012, 42; Magnani 2009, 111–113.

40 Rapp 2005, 224, 228–232.

41 Brown 1992, 96; Rapp 2005, 230–231.

42 Brown 1992, 94–97; Wypszycka 1998. Two sources are particularly eloquent: *Const. apost*. 2, 27 and the canons 7 and 8 of the Synod of Gangra.

bishop even more in the spotlight, since money must necessarily pass through his hands and be employed by him in person: donors were allowed to and did claim participation in and prestige from the construction of new buildings, but the bishop acted alone as representative of the Christian community when it came to negotiating the liberation of prisoners of war.

For all its importance, the role of charity in Ephrem's poems is still limited. First of all, it is confined to Babu, with the other two bishops (Valgash and Jacob) being singled out for other activities. One could object that this is a rhetorical device to differentiate between the bishops and that, if it limits the importance of Babu's episcopal charity, it should also limit the importance of Jacob's episcopal ascesis and Valgash's magisterium. However, it is clear from Ephrem's poems and from later influence that the three bishops did not enjoy the same popularity. The defence of Valgash's preaching is the main theme of *CN* 14, and *CN* 15 and 16 are an apology for his disciplinary methods. Jacob is the main theme of *CN* 13, and he is considered the founding father of the church in Nisibis. On the other hand, Babu appears in the poems only as "the one in the middle" where the other two are present, so that he seems to lack a distinct character of his own. At *CN* 21, 21 the poet does not even mention Babu's episcopate, as he creates a parallelism between Jacob's tenure and Constantine's reign before, Valgash's and Constantius's time after. This inequality is reflected in later sources: in various chronicles, either Babu is absent from the succession of Nisibene bishops, or his episcopate is placed sometimes before and sometimes after Jacob[43]. This confusion hints to a lack of reliable information about him, which may mean that his episcopate was considered unimportant. Therefore, when Ephrem confines episcopal charity to the person of Babu, he limits its importance even as he acknowledges it as a proper part of the bishop's duties.

In Ephrem's poems there are other instances of episcopal charity and episcopal intervention in civic and political life. I will defer to another section (§4.1.2) the role of the bishops during the Persian sieges of the city (*CN* 13, 2; 4) and Abraham's withstanding Emperor Julian (*CN* 18, 5–6), to concentrate here on two important occurrences of episcopal charity. The first has already been mentioned in relation to the image of the fisherman:

ܐܠ ܬܫܠ ܠܪܒܐ ܐܠ ܬܫܒܪ ܠܡܟܝܟܐ
ܐܠ ܬܫܠ ܠܚܠܫܐ ܐܠ ܬܫܒܪ ܠܡܣܟܝܢܐ[44]
(*CN* 19, 10, 1–4)

43 See Fiey 1973, 124; Fiey 1977, 26 refers and explains Elijah of Nisibis' notice that Babu was bishop before Jacob, but was listed in the diptychs of the city after Jacob because Nisibis was not a metropolitan see at his time. Even if this late reconstruction were true (which is unlikely, since the diptychs agree with Ephrem and both are more reliable than Elijah' source), it would not change the relative unimportance of Babu. This is testified also by his absence from other chronicles: *Chronicle of Edessa*, entries 17 and 23; *Chronicon ad 819* (Chabot/Barsaum 1920, 4)= *Chronicon ad 846* (Brooks 1904, 193, 196).

44 "Do not overlook the great [*rabbā*], / do not despair of the weak [*ḥallāšā*], // soften and instruct the rich [*'attīrē*], / bait and win the poor [*meskēnē*]."

Ephrem advocates for a differentiated approach to the different categories of faithful, in the conviction that the bishop should not let anyone on his own. The approach towards the poor is to "bait" (*garreg*) and "acquire" (*qnī*) them. The image of the bait suggests a material gratification used to attract these people, while the verb *qnā*, "to acquire", could imply a financial transaction, even though, admittedly, it has a very general meaning. Together, these verbs intimate that the bishop should employ material charity to attract, convert, and sustain the poor in the faith. Therefore, even if the line refers to material charity, it does so in a passing way and subordinates it to the pastoral care of the bishop, which remains paramount in Ephrem's view.

Finally, two stanzas from *CN* 21 suggest that the bishop was involved in religious buildings:

19
ܒܢ ܡܕܝܢܬܐ ܒܫܠܡ̈ܐ ܚܙܝ ܡܠ̈ܐ ܒܫܠܡ̈ܐ
ܡܫܪܝ ܒܟ ܟܢ̈ܫ̈ܬܐ ܒܬ̈ܝ ܡܕ̈ܪܫ̈ܐ ܒܟ ܢܬ̈ܦ̈ܬܚ̈ܘ
ܡܬ̈ܪ̈ܘܡ ܒܟ ܙ̈ܝ̈ܢ̈ܐ ܡܬ̈ܪ̈ܘܡ̈ ܡܢ ܒ̈ܟ ܡ̈ܙ̈ܕ̈ܒ̈ܚ̈ܘ
ܡܫܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡܢ̈ ܦ̈ܘ̈ܡ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܬ̈ܡ̈ܥ̈ ܒ̈ܟ ܩ̈ܠ̈ܐ
ܒܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܟ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ

20
ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܦ̈ܘ̈ܡ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܒ̈ܟ
ܒ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܟ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ
ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܟ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ
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[45]ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܢ̈ ܒ̈ܟ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ ܒ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ ܡ̈ܫ̈ܪ̈ܝ̈ܐ
(*CN* 21, 19–20)

These stanzas describe Ephrem's wishes after the end of Julian's reign and the accession of Abraham as bishop. Ephrem sees Julian's reign as a fever, the fever of paganism, from which the world is recovering (stanza 18). Previous stanzas had framed Julian's reign as a period of persecution and generalised confusion (stanzas 15–17; see §4.1.2). Stanzas 19–20 describe a return to normalcy, with stanza 19 implying a previous discontinuity in Christian cult. Independently from historical reality, Ephrem wants to present Julian's end and Abraham's accession as a resurrection event, as is clear from stanza 19, especially line 10. The bishop's role in this resurrection is twofold: stanza 19 describes his building and providing for churches, and then stanza 20 calls the bishop to exercise his intercessory power through prayer. What is remarkable in this literary construc-

45 "May the land be appeased in your days, / having seen you so full of peace! // By you may churches be built [*netbnyān 'iddātā*], / may their ornaments return, // in them may their books be opened, / and may their altars be arrayed, // and may their deacons be purified, / may praise rise from them, // first fruits for the Lord of Peace. / **Blessed is he who resuscitated** [*mnaḥḥem*] **our churches!** /// May your prayer rise to the sky / and may rise with it reconciliation; // may the Lord of the sky rain / his bounties on our wickedness, // and his comforts on our grieves, / and his collecting on our dispersion; // may he guard his zeal with his love / our shame may his justice avenge, // our wickedness may his mercy blot out. / **Blessed is he who blessed his flock!**"

tion is the inextricable link of political and liturgical elements. Building churches and arraying them for the liturgy is clearly the sign of the end of a political-religious regime and, in some sense, a public act; and yet it also serves the bishop's function and role as liturgical intercessor before God, since the churches are built in order to give the bishop a proper place for prayer, so that the building activity, even if its political implications are recognised, is primarily seen as a liturgical act, pertaining to the bishop's duties as priest and mediator. This conception of building is totally different from the personal and familiar pride of wealthy lay patrons (and occasionally bishops) or the attention to the "common good" that prompted bishops to participate in civic building enterprises in later times: here, building activity—and, more generally, providing materials (the decors and books in the churches)—is deduced from the bishop's priestly role as heir of Old Testament priesthood[46].

3.1.1.3 Charity between ascesis and parrhesia in Gregory

Gregory limits the role of material charity even more than Ephrem. There is only one reference to giving to the poor in all our poems, and it is framed in a very limiting way:

> Σὺ δ' εἰπέ μοι, βέλτιστε, καὶ πράκτωρ φόρων
> Ἢ καὶ στρατοῦ τιν' ἐκλελοιπὼς ἀξίαν,
> Πόθεν πένης ὤν, εἶθ' ὑπερβάλλων Κῦρον
> Τὸν Μῆδον ἢ τὸν Κροῖσον ἢ Μίδαν πόροις (435)
> – Πλήρη τὸν οἶκον δακρύων κεκτημένος –
> Μετῆλθες εἰς τὸ βῆμα καὶ κρατεῖς θρόνου,
> Ἔπειτα πάντα συλλαβὼν ἔχεις βίᾳ,
> Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια,
> Οἷς οὐδὲ θαρρεῖν προσβλέπειν ἐχρῆν ἴσως (440)
> Τοὺς μὴ λίαν πόρρωθεν ηὐτρεπισμένους;
> . . .
> Γενοῦ Ζακχαῖος· τοῖς μὲν ἠδικημένοις
> Μὴ πλεῖον, αὐτὸ τὸ κεφάλαιον, εἰ δοκεῖ,
> Μόνον κατάθες· οὐ γὰρ φέρεις τὸ τοῦ νόμου·
> Τοῖς δ' αὖ πένησιν εἰσένεγχ' ὅσον θέλεις, (460)
> Καὶ τότε γε Χριστὸν ἑστιάσεις ἀξίως.
> Εἰ δ' ἔνδον ὄντων τῶν σύλων ἢ μικρὰ δοὺς
> Πένησιν οἴει τυγχάνειν ἐλεύθερος,
> Τὸ θεῖον ἡμῖν πέπρατ', εἰ θέμις λέγειν·
> (II, 1, 12, 432–441; 457–464)

46 A famous example of lay familial pride is the dedicatory epigram of the church of St. Polyeuctus in Constantinople, *Anth. Gr.* 1, 10; a similar example, but from a bishop, is Eugenius' epitaph, Calder 1928n170. On episcopal building see Rapp 2005, 220–223, with later examples of civic endeavours "for the common good". Ephrem's framing of the bishop's role in church-building is unique when confronted with the examples given by Rapp; I examine the political and historical implications of these acts on the backdrop of Julian's reign and Ephrem's theology of history at §4.1.2.

But tell me, dear friend and exactor of tributes,
or former-something in the civil service,
how come you, being poor, and then exceeding Cyrus
the Mede, Croesus, or Midas with your revenues, (435)
owning a house made and full of tears,
you migrated to the altar and took hold of the throne,
and still retain what you seized by force?
And finally, you are a tyrant even of God's mysteries,
upon which one shouldn't perhaps even dare to look (440)
if not prepared for a very long time.
. . .
Become a Zacchaeus, and if you want to,
don't give more, but just the sum you stole from them,
for you cannot abide by the law;
give to the poor as much as you want, (460)
and then you'll host Christ properly.
But if you keep the spoils inside or give little
to the poor, and believe yourself to be acquitted,
then our God—if I may speak thus—can be sold.

It is important to give the context of these lines: Gregory has already denounced the moral inadequacy of contemporary bishops and traced its cause to their hasty consecration, which brings to the episcopal throne people with all sorts of vices from their previous life in the world. Gregory brings out the paradoxical situation of these bishops, calling to conversion and atonement the ones already elected.

Furthermore, this portrait of the greedy-turned-bishop also has a real-world referent: Nectarius. Indeed, the hypothetical bishop in the poem is a "former-something in the civil service" (στρατοῦ τιν'ἐκλελοιπὼς ἀξίαν, 433), as Nectarius had been a *praetor urbanus* and then a senator in Constantinople[47]. No other source suggests that Nectarius had also served in any charge that could be described as "exactor of tributes" (πράκτωρ φόρων), though it is not to be excluded. On the other hand, it is possible that here Gregory equates the πράκτωρ with the much more generic "former-something", in order to make Nectarius (if he was never an exactor) fit into the comparison with Zacchaeus. What is certain is that Nectarius was only a catechumen when the Council of Constantinople chose him as bishop, a circumstance which gives great poignancy to Gregory's discussion, just after this passage (442–456 and then again at 465–502), of the purifying power of baptism[48]. Moreover, Nectarius had to be quite rich, since he had

47 Lt. *militia* and *miles*, as well as Gr. στρατός and derived terms (in classicizing writers) could be loosely used for any appointment at the service of the emperor; see Jones 1964, 377. On Nectarius: Jones/Martindale/Morris 1971, 621 *s.v.* "Nectarius 2".

48 θαῦμα δὲ πᾶσιν ἐγένετο, καὶ ἐπυνθάνοντο ὅστις εἴη Νεκτάριος οὗτος καὶ ποδαπὸς τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα καὶ πόθεν. μαθόντες δὲ μηδὲ μυστηρίων μετεσχηκέναι τὸν ἄνδρα ἔτι μᾶλλον κατεπλάγησαν πρὸς τὸ παράδοξον τῆς βασιλέως κρίσεως. … ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντες εἶξαν καὶ τῇ ψήφῳ τοῦ κρατοῦντος συνέβησαν, ἐμυήθη. καὶ τὴν μυστικὴν ἐσθῆτα ἔτι ἡμφιεσμένος κοινῇ ψήφῳ τῆς συνόδου ἀναγορεύεται Κωνσταντινουπόλεως

been *praetor urbanus*, a charge that entailed footing the bill for public games: a venture of considerable expense[49]. This fits well with Gregory's comparison of Nectarius with Cyrus and Croesus, whereas the comparison with Midas is part of Gregory's accusing Nectarius of greed and, consequently, of having hoarded wealth through dishonest means.

Confronted with this rather extreme case, a dishonestly enriched politician pursuing the episcopate without even being baptised and without renouncing his wealth, Gregory takes a surprisingly soft stand: he compares the offender to Zacchaeus and applies a lower standard. Zacchaeus, in a similar situation, had returned four times what he had stolen, in accordance with Roman law and Jewish law (but only for the theft of cattle), giving half of his wealth to the poor, too[50]. And Zacchaeus obtained only forgiveness with his act, while our hypothetical politician is pursuing forgiveness *and* authority in the church. Nonetheless, Gregory's standard is to give back only what was stolen and to offer to the poor a sum of one's choice. It is clear from this discourse that charity is envisaged primarily as a reparative act, purifying the candidate for baptism—and, a fortiori, for the episcopate—of his previous greed. Granted, giving riches to the poor is not just the duty of a former thief, since Gregory makes clear in other places that his ideal bishop must have renounced worldly wealth. Moreover, Gregory recognises a positive function of almsgiving as "hosting Christ" (Χριστὸν ἑστιᾶσαι, 461), a concept echoing the last judgement as predicted by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel (in particular, Mt. 25:40). And yet these feats are required as *preconditions* for becoming bishop, not as activities typical of a bishop. They seem to be much more linked to the individual's salvation and dignity than to his mission as head of a commu-

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ἐπίσκοπος (Soz. 7, 8, 6–7); Ἦν δέ τις Νεκτάριος ὄνομα, συγκλητικοῦ μὲν γένους, ἐπιεικὴς δὲ τὸν τρόπον, δι' ὅλου θαυμαζόμενος, καίτοι τὴν τοῦ πραίτωρος χειρίζων ἀρχήν· ὃς ἁρπασθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ εἰς τὴν ἐπισκοπὴν προεβλήθη (Socr. *h. e.* 5, 8, 30); *Apud Constantinopolim vero Nectarius ex praetore urbano catechumenus et nuper baptisma consecutus, sacerdotium suscepit* (Rufin. *h. e.* 2, 21). The discussion on baptism is analysed at §3.3.2.1.

49 Jones 1964, 689–690, 706.

50 Meier 1989, 124, though I do not agree with Meier's interpretation of οὐ γὰρ φέρεις τὸ τοῦ νόμου (459). He takes it to mean that the subject does not have enough to satisfy the Roman and Jewish law's requirement to give back fourfold the stolen, noting that either Zacchaeus or the subject had formally broken those laws. However, he also contradicts himself, as he says that Gregory is orienting himself on the gospel law, in requiring less from the thief as the Roman and Jewish. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is the teaching of the gospel (which may be dubbed νόμος in this context) which requires from the thief more than Roman and Jewish law, as Zacchaeus' innocence before those laws, and the fact that he gave back and donated anyway, show. Moreover, this is in keeping with the logic of other Gospel teachings, requiring a stricter observance of previous laws (see Mt. 5:21–48 on homicide, adultery, perjury and justice; Mt. 18:21–22 on forgiveness). Therefore, the νόμος Gregory is referring to is neither Jewish nor Roman law, rather it is Zacchaeus' example, the gospel law; the verb φέρω in this context does not mean "to have", but "to bear", "to tolerate". Gregory is applying οἰκονομία to the ἀκριβεία of Zacchaeus' example, because he recognises his target is not capable of such a spectacular renunciation as the gospel would require.

nity. It is, in other words, a matter between the bishop and God, at best pertaining to the moral purity of the minister approaching God on behalf of others, as 439–441 and 464 seem to imply.

If Gregory seems relatively uninterested in material charity as an episcopal function, he dedicates much more attention to a fundamentally episcopal feature—that is, *parrhesia.* The theme has already been investigated by historians, because of its significance to late antique society and the dialectic between this concept and that of *paideia* in the stance taken by different public figures of the time[51]. *Parrhesia* and *paideia* imply two galaxies of concepts and social institutions, which can be rhetorically organised so as to agree or contrast in a variety of ways. According to Brown, *paideia* ("education", παιδεία) is the language of traditional elites, such as *curiales* or senators, and it implies emotional restraint and poise; a classical education and a refined, classicizing language; and a network of ties and bonds placing the individual firmly inside society—through family, marriage, friendship, patronage, and civic service. On the other hand, *parrhesia* (παρρησία)—namely, "speaking truth to power"—is the language of the philosopher and, later, of the "man of God" or holy man. *Parrhesia* implies detachment from society and its bonds, renunciation and retreat from wealth and power, fortitude and restraint of one's emotions, but also the courage to utter inconvenient truths and, in its monastic declination, the refusal of classical culture and its sophisticated speech. Faced with this dichotomy, bishops had to mediate between the urban and lay life of *paideia* and the extremes of ascetic *parrhesia* as they represented an established urban hierarchy claiming also charismatic authority. It is clear from this situation that *parrhesia* and *paideia* not only were the bishop's concrete means of exercising material charity—since he depended for financial support on the urban and imperial elites—but also gave him the role of spokesperson, which the bishop exercised in favour of the Christian congregation and the poor and, with time, of the whole city council; therefore, *parrhesia* is a component of the bishop's social charity.

Gregory's approach to the contrast between *parrhesia* and *paideia* is to propose—as is often his habit—a middle road[52]:

51 The fundamental treatment is given by Brown 1992, 62–70, 72–73, 78, 117. See also: Rapp 2000, 396–397; Rapp 2005, 267–274; for Gregory: Elm 2012, 157; Gautier 2002, 15–16, 122–125. All these studies are in one way or another indebted to Foucault's treatment of the question, which is critically analysed—together with earlier treatments of *parrhesia* in Early Christian texts—by Lynn Benedict 2018, 48–97 (for "episcopal" *parrhesia* in Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa, see her analysis of Basil's showdown with Valens at 237–251). For a more general history of the term, see Leppin 2022.

52 On the significance of the intellectual device of the "middle road" for Gregory's theories: Plagnieaux 1951, 231–232; McGuckin 2001a, 263–264, 246, 250, 254, 263, 273; Gautier 2002, 40, 46–51 (see also 67–69); McGuckin 2006; Boudignon 2017.

Ἐπεὶ δέ σοι μέγιστον ἡ παρρησία,
Ἔστω μέν· οὐδ’ ἔμοιγε φαίνεται βραχύ,
Εἰ σὺν λόγῳ τε χρώμεθα καὶ μετρίως.
Ὅμως δ’ ἄκουσον, ὡς ἔχει· τοῦ γὰρ σοφοῦ
Πλέον τὸ σιγᾶν ἢ τὸ σὸν περιτρέχειν·
σοῦ μὲν γάρ ἐστι καὶ τὸ θάρσος ὡς θράσος·
Τοῦ δ’ εὐγένεια καὶ τὸ συστέλλειν λόγον.
Εἴ που δὲ καιρὸς ἐμπέσοι παρρησίας,
Ὄψει μαχητὴν τὸν πρᾶον, καὶ πηλίκον
Ἐστὶν κατορθῶν, τηνικαῦτα γνωρίσεις.
Γνώσῃ, τί κέρκωψ καὶ τί βρυχᾶται λέων,
Ὅταν τὸ μὲν σὸν ἐκπτύητ’ ἀνθρώπινον
Κάμπτοντος εἰς γῆν τοῦ κακοῦ συνειδότος,
Ὁ δ’ ὢν ἄληπτος λαμβάνηται ῥᾳδίως.
Τρόπου γὰρ οὐδέν ἐστι πιθανώτερον.
Οὕτως ἔλαττον κἀνθάδ’ ὁ τρίβων ἔχει·
Ὅμως δὲ λαμπρὸς ἐν μέσοις καθέζεται
Ἀλλοτρίαν τράπεζαν ἐκκαρπούμενος,
Περιφρονῶν ἅπαντας ὡς ἀμβλώματα
Τοσοῦτον, ὅσον αὐτὸς περιφρονητέος,
Ἓν τοῦτ’ ἔχων φρύαγμα λαμπρὰν τὴν πόλιν –
Ἐφ’ ᾧ σε δεῖ καὶ μᾶλλον ὄλλυσθαι κακῶς.
Πλείους γὰρ οὕτω δημιουργεῖς τοὺς κακούς.
(II, 1, 12, 761–783)

Yet, as you deem free speech the highest value,
I accept it: nor do I find it unimportant,
provided we use it with reason and moderation;
however, mind how things are: the wise man’s
silence is worth more than your claptrap,
for, while even your courage is boldness,
nobility means also curbing our words.
But if the right chance occurs for speaking freely,
you’ll see the meek turn pugnacious, and you’ll experience
in that circumstance how much he’s successful.
You’ll learn how the ape and how the lion roars,
when your human nature will be spit,
as the bad conscience turns towards earth,
while he, being irreproachable, is easily received.
Nothing else in fact is more trustworthy than temper.
Thus in this respect too is the skilful one worse.
Nevertheless he boastfully takes seat in the spotlight,
enjoying the fruits of another man’s table,
so much despising all the others, like abortions,
as he himself should be despised,
having this one spur of pride, his glorious city,
and deserving for this an even more abject downfall:
for in this way you are producing more wicked men.

This passage comes directly after the criticism of the "political" bishop, the forceful definition of the priest's tasks, and the recommendation to delegate the rest to others. The keyword here is μετρίως, "with moderation," which describes Gregory's attitude towards *parrhesia.* The poet concedes to his fictive counterpart that *parrhesia* is an important feature for a bishop, but at the same time he limits its value and attributes it to his own model bishop. Indeed, at 763–767, Gregory reminds the interlocutor of the importance of silence and restraint in addition to *parrhesia* and subtracts *parrhesia* proper from the "political" bishop (ὁ τρίβων, 776), reserving it for the bishop who is σοφός (764), εὐγενής (767), and πρᾶος (769). These are, however, the marks of late antique *paideia*, noble birth, the command of culture and mastery of one's own emotions, especially rage. Thus, Gregory's attitude towards *parrhesia* implies the presence of *paideia*. Neither Gregory nor his audience is prepared to utterly upend the social order and its conventions for the sake of unrestrained *parrhesia*, and Gregory's emphasis on silence as a balancing principle forces his hypothetical counterpart into the unpalatable position of the radical, reserving for Gregory himself the commonsensical middle way. Furthermore, by setting *paideia* as a prerequisite for authentic and authoritative *parrhesia*, Gregory implies that at the heart of parrhesia, there must be a renunciation of a former, exalted status: no uneducated commoner can easily claim to teach and criticise[53]. The distinction between authentic and authoritative *parrhesia* on one side and simple rashness on the other is aptly expressed at 771 with the metaphor of the lion and the ape: the lion represents authority, and the ape a distorted imitation thereof. In fact, the bad bishop is marked by his greed and pride, features opposed to the selfless renunciation which only gives the authority necessary to speak with *parrhesia*. In the end, such vices make for the opposite of what a bishop should be: Gregory expresses this thought obliquely when he says that the skilful bishop in his pride despises the others "as abortions" (ὡς ἀμβλώματα, 779). The word ἄμβλωμα is the Atticist synonym for the Koine Greek ἔκτρωμα, a word famously used by Paul in his self-presentation as the "last of the apostles"[54]. However, since Paul is, in Gregory's thought, the very model of the bishop—as demonstrated by his long discussion of Paul's life in *or.* 2—when the skilful bishop applies this comparison to his colleagues instead of applying it to himself, he is effectively reversing Paul's example.

This negative image of the bishop is reprised and expanded at II, 1, 17:

53 Regarding renouncement as the heart of authority: Brown 1992, 74–75. A certain elitism in the Cappadocians' approach has been often observed, but it must not be forgotten that Gregory stresses above all moral adequacy as the primary requisite for the bishop and the theologian, and even his definition of σοφία cannot be totally identified with secular *paideia*.

54 ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερεὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κἀμοί (1Cor. 15:8); Ἐξέτρωσεν ἡ γυνὴ μὴ λέγε, ἀλλὰ ἐξήμβλωσεν· ὡσαύτως ἄμβλωμα καὶ ἀμβλωθρίδιον, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἔκτρωμα (Phrynichus Arabius *Eclogae* 257–258).

Οὐ θνητοῦ βασιλῆος ὁμέστιος, ὡς τοπάροιθεν,
Γρηγόριος, θυλάκῳ ἦρα φέρων ὀλίγην,
Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, κατηφιόων καὶ ἄναυδος,
Ἄπνοον ἄσθμα φέρων, δούλια δαινύμενος.
Οὐχ ἕδρῃ τίσει με δικασπόλος, ἠὲ συνέδρῳ,
Ἠὲ χαμαιπετέϊ, πνεύματι μέτρα νέμων.
Οὐδὲ χέρας φονίους προσπτύξομαι, οὐδὲ γενείου
Δράξομαι, ὥστ᾽ ὀλίγης ἀντιτυχεῖν χάριτος·
Οὐδ᾽ ἱερὴν ἐπὶ δαῖτα, γενέθλιον, ἠὲ θανόντος,
Ἤ τινα νυμφιδίην σὺν πλεόνεσσι θέων,
Πάντα τὰ μὲν γναθμοῖσιν ἑλώρια, τὰ δ᾽ ἄρ᾽ ὀπηδοῖς
Θήσομαι, ἁρπαλέαις Βριαρέω παλάμαις·
Ὀψὲ δὲ φορτίδ᾽ ἄγων, τάφον ἔμπνοον, ἄψ ἐπὶ δῶμα
Ἕλξω, τὴν μογερὴν γαστέρα τειρόμενος,
Ἄσθμα κόροιο φέρων, ἄλλην ἐπὶ δαῖτα παχείην
Σπεύδων, πρὶν προτέρην ὕβριν ἀποσκεδάσαι.
(II, 1, 17, 59–74)

No more a guest of a mortal king, as was before,
is Gregory, giving tiny gifts to his envelope,
lying in the public, downcast and mute,
with a breathless panting and feasting on slavish food.
The judge won't punish me with a seat, either equal
or lower, to give a measure to my inflation.
Nor will I greet murderous hands or clutch
their cheek to obtain a measly favour,
nor will I run with many people to some holiday feast,
either for a birthday or for a funeral or a wedding,
to put every spoil in my jaws or give it to my attendants
with the rapacious hands of a Briareus;
then late, bearing a burden, as a living grave, I'll drag myself
back home, worn out by the toiling belly,
slurring the breath of surfeit, still hurrying towards another
fat feast, before having dispersed the previous glut.

Here, Gregory is describing the consequences of his renunciation of the episcopal see of Constantinople. He describes behaviours that are expected from the bishop of an important city. They are similar to the behaviours of the bishop-politician of II, 1, 12, 777–783, who is in fact described as the bishop of an important city (λαμπρὰν τὴν πόλιν, II, 1, 12, 781). The difference is that the bishop-politician is proud of such behaviours, whereas Gregory sheds light on their moral corruption and their unworthiness of a bishop. This is shown by the different attitudes of Gregory and the bishop-politician regarding public life: while the skilful bishop is boastful (λαμπρός, II, 1, 12, 777) in his public appearances, Gregory shows a humble demeanour (κατηφιόων καὶ ἄναυδος, II, 1, 17, 61), because he is conscious that much of his public importance is just a concession from the powers that be, and in particular from the emperor (θνητοῦ βασιλῆος, II, 1, 17, 59). Even the verbs expressing the public appearance of the bishop reveal two different attitudes: the

proud bishop "takes his seat in public" (ἐν μέσοις καθέζεται, II, 1, 12, 777), while Gregory helplessly "lies in public" (Κείμενος ἐν μέσσοισι, II, 1, 17, 61).

This contrast, as well as the contrast between the lion and the ape at line 771, shows how self-deluded and inauthentic the life of the skilful bishop is: he prides himself in a condition he should be ashamed of, he eats from somebody else's table (ἀλλοτρίαν τράπεζαν, II, 1, 12, 778) without noticing that these perks cost his freedom (δούλια δαινύμενος, II, 1, 17, 62), he despises his inferiors, while it is he who should be despised (II, 1, 12, 779–780), and, finally, he believes that his important seat is an advantage, while in reality for him it is a source of damnation, because the greater the episcopate, the greater damages he makes (II, 1, 12, 781–783).

The passage from II, 1, 17 is clearly written to convey disgust for feasts, most of all. It does so not only with the plural neuter δούλια (62) but also with the word "jaws" (γναθμοῖσιν, 69), a Homeric term used at *Od.* 18, 29 in Irus's threat to Odysseus to "knock off all his teeth from his jaws as those of a wild crop-devouring sow", reprised by Euripides in a metaphor comparing poison to a wild beast devouring Glauce's flesh (Eur. *Med.* 1201) and often employed for animals (Leonidas, *Anth. Gr.* 9, 99, 4; Nicander *Theriaca* 183; Tryphiod. 73). The word "spoils" (ἐλώρια, 69) is used in the proem of the *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 1, 4) of the corpses left for the wild scavengers. The metaphor of the "living grave" (τάφον ἔμπνοον, 71) for the belly full of food was a theme of cynic diatribe against meat eaters—for example, the sentence γίνεσθε νεκρῶν θηρίων περιπατοῦντες τάφοι, found in Palladius *de Gentibus Indiae et Bragmanibus* 2, 45, 9. The reference to the foul breath overeating leaves (ἄσθμα κόροιο φέρων, 73) is meant to elicit disgust for the whole affair. Besides, disgust, pain, and exhaustion are also associated with public feasts, as the stuffed body is described as a "merchant ship" (φορτίδα, 71), movement is a "dragging oneself" (ἕλξω, 72), the toiling stomach fatigues (τὴν μογερὴν γαστέρα τειρόμενος, 72), the feasts are fat (δαῖτα παχείην, 73), the bishop is always in a hurry to content everyone (θέων, 68; σπεύδων, 74), and eating is an outrage (ὕβριν, 74). Avoiding feasts and banquets likely meant cutting oneself out of the network of lobbying that shaped so much of late antique public life, which is exactly what Gregory wants to do, since he explicitly refuses to engage in social networking at lines 65–66. Note also how he minimises the advantages of such activity: his guest is only a mortal king (θνητοῦ βασιλῆος, 59), as opposed to God, the Immortal King; the food is scarce (ἦρα ὀλίγην, 60), the gratitude measly (ὀλίγης χάριτος, 66). He also presents social networking as a series of humiliations (κατηφιόων καὶ ἄναυδος, 61; δούλια δαινύμενος, 62; lines 63–64) suffered to appease unworthy masters (χέρας φονίους προσπτύξομαι, 65). Finally, these lines are immediately followed by the reduction of the bishop's preaching to a form of spectacle which we have examined in §2.2.4.9.

It is true that Gregory presents this stance as a personal one, since he mentions his own name in line 60, and it must be noted that the context is not the choice of a new bishop, but the motives and prospects of the resigning one. Hence, even though II, 1, 17, 59–74 shares many features with II, 1, 12, 776–783, it is not completely correct to treat them as if they were addressing the exact same topic. However, the passage

at II, 1, 17 demonstrates that, in Gregory's view, there can be an excess of *paideia*, or rather, a misplaced *paideia*, through which the bishop becomes too accommodating to the powerful and too entrenched in the mechanisms of this world, thereby losing his moral high ground and, ultimately, his freedom. This means that, as authentic *parrhesia* cannot exist without the foundation of *paideia*, because otherwise it loses authority, so *paideia* cannot be appropriated without preserving a space of *parrhesia* and "otherness" for the mechanisms of the world, for otherwise the bishop would become just a political position among others, thereby failing his mission. Therefore, although in II, 1, 12, 761–783 Gregory seems to reject *one* model of bishop and to propose another, he is really rejecting two different models: on one side, the unruly and uncouth "outsider", who ignores the rules of politics and order with his licentious *parrhesia*, and on the other, the politician perfectly integrated in those rules, pursuing his personal ambition through the church and without moral concerns. The model bishop is Gregory himself: firmly grounded in the world of *paideia*, he renounces that very world, so that he can judge it from the outside and exercise an authentic and measured *parrhesia.*

Gregory rejects false *parrhesia* in line 776: οὕτως ἔλαττον κἀνθάδ' ὁ τρίβων ἔχει. This line is very ambiguous, because τρίβων can have two meanings: first, it is the name of a kind of cloak worn by philosophers, in particular Cynic philosophers; second, it can mean "expert", "skilful". The second meaning is very apt, both because at the beginning of the discussion on the political abilities of the bishop the same term and a synonym were employed, and because the term is employed in this rare sense most of all in iambic poetry[55]. On the other hand, the philosopher's coat may not be out of place here, since Gregory is talking about *parrhesia*, a concept commonly associated with philosophers, particularly those of Cynic tendencies: indeed, the τρίβων was almost the distinctive sign of the παρρησιαστής[56]. This double profile corresponds to Gregory's two competitors for the seat of Constantinople, or at least it corresponds to their literary

55 For the meanings, see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1817, *s.v.* τρίβων (A) and (B). The first three lines of this discussion sound: ἀλλ'εὔστροφός τις οὗτος ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν / ὃν οὐκ ἐπαινεῖς, ἐντελής τε προστάτης / τρίβων παλαιῶν καὶ νεῶν κινημάτων (II, 1, 12, 709–711). Clearly, ὁ τρίβων (776) refers back to this passage. εὔστροφος is somewhat equivalent to τρίβων, since both refer to skill in social relationships, one by way of the attitude implied by this skilled (quick changes to adapt to new situations) and the other by way of the experience required. Excluding Herodt. 4, 74, all instances of τρίβων in the sense of "expert" are in iambs: Eur. *Bacch.* 717; *Med.* 686; *El.* 1127; *Cycl.* 520; Aristoph. *nub.* 869–870; *vesp.* 1429. Later is employed also in prose; see: τρίβωνα λόγων at Greg. Nyss. *c. Eunom.* 1, 1, 12 (quoting Eur. *Bacch.* 717); *virg.* 6, 2, 34. The expression παλαιῶν καὶ νεῶν κινημάτων subverts the character of the scribe who learns from the Kingdom of Heaven in Mt. 13:52: πᾶς γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς τῇ βασιλείᾳ τῶν οὐρανῶν ὅμοιός ἐστιν ἀνθρώπῳ οἰκοδεσπότῃ, ὅστις ἐκβάλλει ἐκ τοῦ θησαυροῦ αὐτοῦ καινὰ καὶ παλαιά (see also: καὶ ἐπὶ θύραις ἡμῶν πάντα ἀκρόδρυα, νέα πρὸς παλαιά, ἀδελφιδέ μου, ἐτήρησά σοι. Cant. 7:14).

56 The pun on the double meaning of τρίβων had been already exploited by Aristophanes at *nub.* 869–870 (Sommerstein 2007, 203 *ad* 870). On *parrhesia* being associated with the philosopher (and the Cynic in particular): Brown 1992, 62–65; Montserrat 2017, 69–71; Lynn Benedict 2018, 184–187. On the τρίβων and his association with the philosopher: Urbano 2014, 177–183 (with copious bibliography).

presentation by Gregory himself: the "Cynic" Maximus, backed by Ambrose and Italian bishops, would be the radical big mouth of 761–775, whereas Senator Nectarius, backed by the Antiochians and the emperor, would be the old fox of politics of lines 777–783 (and implied at II, 1, 17, 59–74)[57]. Therefore, Gregory's device of the middle road serves not only to imply that he himself is the model bishop but also, and most of all, to relegate his main contenders to the two extremes of the spectrum.

To sum up, both Ephrem and Gregory have a very limited vision of the material charity of the bishop. It is interesting to observe that, while the poets employ many terms of leadership and of priesthood (see §2.1.1–2), they almost completely lack words for material charity. They both propose to delegate the tasks connected with the material and "secular" managing of the community to other figures, arguing that such tasks damage the psychological and moral purity of the bishops, thereby impairing their priestly powers. However, the theme is not completely absent from our texts; it is just limited to individual cases, as opposed to such general statements as advice, exhortation, or theorisation.

Ephrem employs charity primarily to flesh out the character of one of the three bishops of Nisibis, Babu. Therefore, charity is less a required virtue of the bishop in general and more of a personal characteristic of Babu; and since Babu is clearly the least important of the three bishops, material charity ends up as a low priority. It is true that Ephrem recommends two typical behaviours of this character to the new bishop, Abraham, thereby recognizing their universal validity, but the recommendations are very limiting. Material charity is to be used as an evangelizing technique towards poor people, and the rebuilding and refurbishing of churches belongs more to the priestly duties of the bishop, which are materially determined in this case by the aftermath of Julian's reign.

Gregory does not even describe reigning prelates with the most common characteristics of lovers of the poor. He mentions donations and charity only as a prerequisite to the episcopate and as a reparative act in the case of rich people wanting to enter

57 On the different claims on Constantinople's episcopal seat, see §4.1.2. Maximus was commonly associated with Cynicism and the τρίβων: *in Constantinopolitana civitate Cynicum ad sacerdotium vocare . . . nesciebant philosophorum habitum non convenire incessui christiano* (Damas. *ep.* 5); περὶ Μαξίμου τοῦ Κυνικοῦ καὶ τῆς κατ'αὐτὸν ἀταξίας τῆς ἐν Κωνσταντινουπόλει γενομένης (*Canons of Constantinople* 4); Μάξιμον . . . γὰρ Ἀλεξανδρέα τὸ γένος ὄντα κυνικόν τε φιλόσοφον τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα (Soz. 7, 9, 4); Μάξιμόν τινα κεχειροτόνηκε κυνικόν, εὐθὺς αὐτοῦ τὰς κυνικὰς ἀποκείρας τρίχας (Theodrt. *h. e.* 5, 8). Gregory amplified this image in his poetry: Maximus as a Cynic and dog (II, 1, 11, 751–752; 924–926; 938; II, 1, 41, 3; 35; 48); carrying a stick (βακτηρία) as the Cynic did (II, 1, 11, 768); inauthentic (II, 1, 11, 791–806; 954–967); like Proteus (cf. II, 1, 12, 729 with II, 1, 11, 807–808); exercising *parrhesia* (Τὸν Μάξιμον γνώτωσαν ἐκ παρρησίας, II, 1, 41, 32); with the τρίβων (II, 1, 41, 42); full of conceit (θράσος: cf. II, 1, 12, 766 with II, 1, 41, 10; 31; 49; 59, the last one ἀπαίδευτον θράσος!). The same antithesis between lion and ape is found at II, 1, 39, 80, another poem which may have Maximus as its target. Nectarius is never addressed directly, but it is likely that Gregory is often referring to him: McLynn 1997; McGuckin 2001a, 375n25; McGuckin 2001b, 161; Storin 2011, 236.

the clergy. He devotes much more energy to the theme of *parrhesia*, which is understandable for a poet who had to deal personally with the emperor. Gregory recognises the importance for the bishop of treating with the powers that be and describes two characters that exemplify two opposing errors in this realm. One is the big-mouthed outsider, the Cynic philosopher who tries to upend the social order through his philosophy—a covert satire of Maximus. The other character, corresponding to Gregory's memories of Constantinople in II, 1, 17 and to the proud and protean politician of II, 1, 12, is the bishop too attached to secular hierarchies and too involved with the elite world. Gregory criticises both not only for their moral failures but also for their political insignificance: the Cynic is invested with an inauthentic *parrhesia*, because he lacks the authority that would make his criticisms credible; the politician may gain personal or short-term advantages from his closeness to secular power, but he will ultimately depend upon them to the point of humiliating his own exalted office.

3.1.2 High priest

The main lines of Gregory's and Ephrem's treatment of priesthood have already been traced at §2.1.3 through the analysis of related terms, such as ἱερεύς and *kāhnā*. Having recalled them, I will add other passages to flesh out better the elements already known. As regards Gregory, I will analyse a recurring structural element of our poems—namely, the use of priestly imagery towards the end to describe Gregory's asceticism in retirement. This priestly imagery is lexically parallel to the passage already analysed at §2.1.3 on the ideal priest. Then, I will consider some passages in Ephrem where priestly attributes are passed down from one bishop to the other on the basis of personal holiness. I will ask if this means that the episcopate is conceived as an honorary title more than a function in the community. Finally, I will examine a group of Ephremian passages where the poet attributes beneficial powers to the bishop's celebration of the liturgy. These passages tie into broader themes of Ephrem poetry that are here anticipated and will be reprised extensively in the chapter that is specifically on Ephrem (§4.1.2). However, these passages also show some differences in Ephrem's and Gregory's conceptions of liturgical priesthood.

Ephrem and Gregory conceive priesthood by and large along the lines of the Old Testament institution. They concentrate on the rules of purity, interpreting them allegorically as requiring moral probity. In this respect, Gregory goes further than Ephrem, because while Ephrem interprets the Eucharist as the true sacrifice, Gregory says that, besides administering the Eucharist, the bishop should present the souls of his community, morally perfected in his guidance, to God as an offering. Ritual purity in this moral sense serves Ephrem as a basis for excluding from or including in the bishop's personal jurisdiction different tasks, such as judging—excluded on the ground of the distractions it entails—or building churches—included because part of the bishop's role as priest

before God. Finally, for both poets, the bishop is a mediator between God and humanity, transmitting top-down truth, morality, and spiritual gifts.

To these ideas, it is worth adding a pattern recurring in Gregory's poems. At the beginning of II, 1, 10 and II, 1, 13, as well as in various other places, Gregory presents the task of the bishop as the priestly offering of the Eucharist. The profusion of words of purity and the context of such utterances suggests that the theme is touched upon to conjure the devotion due to the Eucharist against immoral—and therefore impure—bishops: Gregory expresses outrage and enjoins the reader to the same. In II, 1, 10, the first line (Ὦ θυσίας πέμποντες ἀναιμάκτους, ἱερῆες) is a call to witness that uses the most sacred function of bishops in order to bind and solemnise their summoning. In II, 1, 13, 1 the same line opens an anticlimax, ending with a description of bishops as comic actors, and in this context, it is fitting to begin with the most sacred function of bishops. The insistence on purity at II, 1, 12, 148–151 (ἁγνοὶ, καθάρσια, ἁγνίσουσι) contrasts with the vicious treatment the bishops gave Gregory, removing him during an illness[58]. The mention of θεοῦ μυστήρια in II, 1, 12, 439 may well be a reference to the Eucharist—or in general to sacraments, introduced to excite outrage at the "tyranny" (τυραννῶν) that the greedy-man-turned-bishop exercised over them[59]. Lines 751–760 have already been analysed more than once (see §2.1.3 and §3.1.1.1). Their parallel in II, 1, 17, 21–40 is clearly employed as a foil to present the bad behaviour of real-life bishops: the aim of the poem is precisely to confront the two different lifestyles of good and bad bishops[60]. The passage at II, 1, 13, 184–197 develops a long description of the Old Testament temple and its purity regulations in order to chastise the bishops for their take adequate time to deliberate when electing new prelates (see §3.3.2.2).

However, words of offering and sacrifice tend to appear also in another specific location in these poems. In fact, Gregory caps them with descriptions of his ascetic retirement in terms of priesthood, often as an antithesis to the unworthy deeds described in the body of the poem:

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58 Ἔπειτ' ἀροῦσι χεῖρας ὡς ἁγνοὶ Θεῷ / Καὶ δῶρα πέμψουσ' ἐκ φρενὸς καθάρσια / Καὶ λαὸν ἁγνίσουσι μυστικοῖς λόγοις, / Οἳ καί μ' ἔπεμψαν ἔνθεν ἐκ πονηρίας (II, 1, 12, 148–151).

59 Τέλος τυραννῶν καὶ Θεοῦ μυστήρια (II, 1, 12, 439). See also §2.1.2.1; §3.1.1.3.

60 Αὐτὰρ ὅ γε τρομερῆσι καὶ εὐαγέσιν παλάμῃσι / Δῶρον ἄγει, Χριστοῦ σαρκὶ χαριζόμενος, / Καὶ μεγάλοις παθέεσσιν, ἅπερ Θεὸς ἐνθάδ' ἀνέτλη, / Ῥύσιον ἀρχεγόνων ἡμετέρων παθέων· / Ὧι ζώει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ᾧ ῥα κεάζει / Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἔνθεν ἀνιστάμενος. / Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι/ Κάμπτεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυόεις ἀδάμας· / Οὐδ' ὅ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θοώκων, / Οὐ δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης· / Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος, / Κεύθει κερδῴην ἔνδοθι δουλοσύνην, / Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος, ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις / Παντοδαποῖς κακίης εἴδεσι κλεπτόμενος. / Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων, / Ἤδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης, / Ἧς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῆσι, / Κῦδος ἓν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος, / Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἁγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων, / Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἄναιμα φέρει (II, 1, 17, 21–40).

II, 1, 10, 31–34
Τοὔνεκα καγχαλόων φθόνον ἔκφυγον, ἐκ μεγάλου δὲ
Χείματος, ἐν σταθερῷ πεῖσμα βάλον λιμένι,
Ἔνθα νόου καθαροῖσι νοήμασι θυμὸν ἀείρων,
Θύσω καὶ σιγὴν, ὡς τὸ πάροιθε λόγον.

Therefore, with a laugh I flew envy, and from a violent
storm I dropped anchor in a steady haven,
where, elevating my spirit with pure thoughts of the mind,
I shall offer silence too, as before speech.

II, 1, 12, 803–808
Χωρεῖτ᾽· ἐγὼ δὲ συστραφήσομαι Θεῷ,
Ὧι ζῶ πνέω τε καὶ πρὸς ὃν βλέπω μόνον,
Ὧι πρὶν γενέσθαι μ᾽ ἡ τεκοῦσ᾽ ὑπέσχετο, (805)
Ὧι κίνδυνοί συνῆψαν καὶ νυκτῶν χάρις.
Τούτῳ τε **θύσω** νοῦ καθαρὰ κινήματα,
Ὡς γοῦν ἐφικτὸν, προσλαλῶν μόνῳ μόνος.

Go ahead, I'll recollect myself in God,
by whom I live and breathe and for whom I look,
to whom before birth my mother promised me, (805)
with whom dangers and the gifts of night bound me,
and to him I'll sacrifice pure movements of the mind,
as far as it's possible at least, alone talking to him alone.

II, 1, 13, 209–215
Ὧν ὅδε δεσμὸς ἔχει πλάγκτην νόον ἔνδον ἀγείρας,
Εἴσω πᾶς ὀρόων, γελόων βιότοιο θυέλλας, (210)
Αἳ ῥά τε καὶ πινυῶν αἰσχρῶς κονίουσι πρόσωπα,
Αἰεί τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσων,
Χείροσιν οὐκ ἐπίμικτα, διαυγέα, φωτὶ πελάζων
Τρισσοφαοῦς θεότητος, ἐπειγομένοισι πόθοισιν
Ἵλαον ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ πρὸς θῶκον **ἱκοίμην**· (215)

Whence this bond stops the erring mind, recollecting it inside:
all turned inwards, laughing about the storms of life, (210)
which still soil shamefully even the faces of the wise,
and always impressing on the heart divine notions,
approaching nothing mixed with evil, but pure, to the light
of the Thrice-Shining Godhead, with urging longings,
I shall come to the propitious throne of God immortal; (215)

II, 1, 17, 101–102
Ταῦτα μὲν, οἷσι φίλον, καὶ κερκώπων κράτος εἴη·
Αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Χριστοῦ πλήσομαι ἀτρεμέων.

Let these things to the one who cares about them, and the power to the monkeys,
while I'll fill full of Christ in stillness.

These passages share the same context and a group of themes. They are all towards the end of the respective poems, preceded by a forceful denunciation of the bishops' bad ways and Gregory's denial of his involvement in their workings: I preserved in the quotations the sentences bridging this theme to Gregory's description of his ascetic retreat (II, 1, 10, 31–32; II, 1, 12, 803; II, 1, 13, 208–211; II, 1, 17, 101). However, this description is never the last word of the poems. This is particularly clear in II, 1, 12, where Gregory introduces his "valedictory speech" (ἐξιτήριον λόγον, 812) right after the quoted passage, and the speech goes on some twenty lines after that, but the other poems, too, have at least a couplet after the passage quoted. Except for II, 1, 10, all poems end on a slightly threatening note, entrusting the ecclesiastical situation to God's judgement[61].

Among the common themes in these passages, remarkable is the priestly language describing ascetic practices. In II, 1, 10, Gregory "sacrifices" (θύσω, 34) silence[62]. In II, 1, 12 the sacrifice is the "movements of the mind" (νοῦ κινήματα, 807), which, in accordance with Old Testament precepts, must be pure to be offered (see §2.1.3.1). The phrase κινήματα νοῦ (and hence its synonym, the νοήματα)[63] is a technical term, κίνημα, which can have many different meanings but, in its most generic sense, is any content of the mind[64]. Origen notably employs it for the voluntary and free intentions of rational beings; from Origen, the term in this sense enters theological and ascetic vocabulary, in particular in the Cappadocians Fathers[65]. Therefore, the "pure movements" and "pure thoughts" of Gregory's poems refer to a striving, half intellectual and half practical, to meditate exclusively on God, avoiding material interests and other desires. In II, 1, 13,

61 Τὰ δ' ἄλλα ἐκεῖθεν, ὦ φίλοι, λελέξεται (II, 1, 12, 811), where ἐκεῖθεν means "in the afterlife" (see Meier 1989, 164); Ἔνθα τε πάντ' ἀναφανδὰ, τὸ δὲ πλέον ἰσοτάλαντον / Τῆμος ὅτ' ἐν χείρεσσι Θεοῦ ζυγὸν ὀρθοδίκοιο (II, 1, 13, 216–217); Εὔχομαι, ὥς κεν ἅπαντα Θεῷ φίλα τοῖσδε μεμήλοι, / Εἰ δὲ χερειότερα, τηλόθεν οὔατ' ἔχειν. (II, 1, 17, 107–108).

62 On the theme of silence as sacrifice and the meaning of this innovative practice in Gregory's asceticism: Gautier 2002, 51–52, 195–213; Storin 2011.

63 See νοῦν δὲ τίνα; μὴ τὸν ἐν ἄλλῳ, καὶ οὗ κινήματα τὰ διανοήματα (*or.* 28, 13). All other occurrences of διανοήματα are coupled with κινήματα.

64 E.g.: ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ διάφορα κινήματα φαίνεται, καὶ ἔστιν ἐν αὐτῇ τὸ λογίζεσθαι, καὶ τὸ ἐπιθυμεῖν, καὶ τὸ θυμοειδὲς, ἐκ δὲ τῆς τούτων κινήσεως καὶ ἡ τῶν μελῶν γίνεται τοῦ σώματος ἐνέργεια (Athan. *ep. ad Marcell.* 27); πολλαὶ γὰρ δυνάμεις καὶ διάφορα κινήματα ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ· καθ' ἃ ποτὲ μὲν σπουδαῖόν τι διανοούμεθα, ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιθυμοῦμεν, ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιθυμούμεθα, ποτὲ δὲ κρίνομεν (Eus. *in Ps. 101*, 1).

65 E.g.: οἱ δὲ ἀνακείμενοι τῷ θείῳ λόγῳ καὶ πρὸς μόνῃ τῇ θεραπείᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ γινόμενοι γνησίως κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν τῶν εἰς τοῦτο κινημάτων λευῖται καὶ ἱερεῖς οὐκ ἀτόπως λεχθήσονται, (Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 1, 2, 10); Ἐξ ἰδίας αἰτίας τῶν μὴ προσεχόντων ἑαυτοῖς ἀγρύπνως γίνονται τάχιον ἢ βράδιον μεταπτώσεις, καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἢ ἐπ' ἔλαττον, ὡς ἀπὸ ταύτης τῆς αἰτίας, κρίσει θείᾳ συμπαραμετρούσῃ τοῖς ἑκάστου βελτίοσιν ἢ χείροσι κινήμασι καὶ τὸ κατ' ἀξίαν, ὁ μέν τις ἕξει ἐν τῇ ἐσομένῃ διακοσμήσει τάξιν ἀγγελικὴν ἢ δύναμιν ἀρχικὴν ἢ ἐξουσίαν τὴν ἐπί τινων ἢ θρόνον τὸν ἐπὶ βασιλευομένων ἢ κυρείαν τὴν κατὰ δούλων, (*princ. frg.* 11). In later authors, e.g.: Εἰ γὰρ μὴ τὰ πρῶτα πρὸς πονηρίας κινήματα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκτμηθείη, (Eus. *in Ps. 99*, 8); τὸ εὐμετάβλητον καὶ ἄστατον τῶν κατὰ προαίρεσιν κινημάτων (Basil. *hex.* 3, 9); δόλον λέγω καὶ ἐπιθυμίαν καὶ τῦφον ὀργήν τε καὶ φθόνον καὶ ὅσα πονηρὰ τῆς κακίας ἔνδον ἔστι κινήματα (Greg. Nyss. *inst.* 8, 1, 55, 18). For a story of these κινήματα stretching back to the Stoics, see Sorabji 2000.

Gregory, as the Hebrew high priest, approaches the throne of God, being ἵλαον, a word with sacrificial undertones. In fact, the sentence ἵλαον ἀθανάτοιο Θεοῦ πρὸς θῶκον ἱκοίμην expresses succinctly and in Homeric Greek the elements of the Yom Kippur ritual (Lev. 16) and its Christian interpretation (Hebr. 9): the verb ἱκνέομαι not only is an epic metaphrase of the biblical εἰσπορεύομαι (Lev. 16:2), εἰσέρχομαι (Lev. 16:3), or εἴσειμι (Hebr. 9:6) but also has the technical sense of "beseech" "approach as suppliant"[66], which is apt for the mediatory function of the high priest and the the Yom Kippur ritual's aim of finding forgiveness; even more remarkable is the expression ἵλαον θῶκον, which, to my knowledge, is unparalleled. I suspect this expression tries to convey in Homeric language the concept of "mercy seat", the lid on the ark of the covenant whereupon God was thought to sit as on a throne. The lid of the ark—in Hebrew, *kapporet*, from a root expressing both "covering" and "atonement"—was called in Greek ἱλαστήριον (see Lev. 16:2; 14 in the Septuagint version; Hebr. 9:2), preserving only the "atonement" meaning. Though the term, which has the same root of Gregory's adjective ἵλαον, does not imply the concept of "seat" or "throne" in Greek, it must have been known to Gregory (for example, from 1Sam. 4:4) that the space between the two cherubim on the lid of the ark was conceived as God's throne; hence Gregory's use of the term θῶκος. The elegiac II, 1, 17 does not present this theme, but shares with II, 1, 10 the idea of "silence" (ἀτρεμέων, 102).

These priestly elements are very significant if we take into account the position of the passages and their language. The same language of purity, of approaching to the divine and of mental discipline, employed here to describe Gregory's retreat, is employed in the body of the poems to describe the ideal priest[67]. Furthermore, the description of Gregory's retreat is encased between Gregory distancing himself from the behaviour of bad bishops and his entrusting true judgement to God. The resulting message is that, paradoxically, the true priest is the one renouncing priesthood—at least in its institutional, public, and concrete sense—to embrace a concealed and spiritual kind of priesthood, ascesis. Hence, the liturgical priesthood exercised by the other bishops in the poems ends up being rather minimised in its importance. Here Gregory shows clearly the influence of Origen on his thought: Origen's spiritual interpretation of priesthood, touching not only on the Old Testament institution but also on contemporary church hierarchy, tended to relativise the importance of institutional priesthood

66 Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 826–827, *s.v.* ἱκνέομαι.

67 Cf. the passage II, 1, 12, 751–760 and its parallel at II, 1, 17, 21–40 with these passages: ψυχὰς . . . ἄνω φέροντα (II, 1, 12, 752–753), θυμὸν . . . ἀνιστάμενος . . . νόον ἀέξων (II, 1, 17, 26; 35) and θυμὸν ἀείρων (II, 1, 10, 33); ἐνθέοις κινήμασι (II, 1, 12, 753), καθαροῖσι νοήμασι (II, 1, 17, 35) and καθαροῖσι νοήμασι (II, 1, 10, 33), καθαρὰ κινήματα (II, 1, 12, 807), ἐπειγομένοισι πόθοισιν (II, 1, 13, 214); τὰς θείας μόνας / ἀκηλιδώτους ἐμφάσεις τυπούμενον (II, 1, 12, 754–755), Τριάδος . . . τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῆισι / Κῦδος ἓν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος (II, 1, 17, 36–37) and αἰεί τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσων / χείροσιν οὐκ ἐπίμικτα, διαυγέα, φωτὶ πελάζων / τρισσοφαοῦς θεότητος (II, 1, 13, 212–214). The main difference of the passages at the end of poems from those in the body is the absence of any reference to the people the priest should lead to God, because here Gregory is renouncing his leading position.

in favour of spiritual and moral accomplishment, to the point that sometimes he seems to doubt the very necessity of institutional priesthood. On the other hand—and this is what Gregory took from Origen—Origen's stress on moral accomplishment kept the institution in check, providing a forceful call to be up to the task the Spirit had given to them[68]. Gautier, who has noted this minimisation, reads into it a Messalian tendency and a contradiction with Gregory's idea that public priesthood is the culmination of asceticism, not vice versa[69]. In my opinion, the importance of these passages should not be overstated: except for one passage in *or.* 2[70], texts[71] in which Gregory presents asceticism as a priestly sacrifice are all in contexts similar to the passages examined here, where Gregory tries to minimise the failure of a retreat from the episcopal office; if one takes into account the late antique rhetorical trope of refusal of office, it becomes clear that this imagery is more of a rhetorical strategy than a committed theological claim on the relationship between ascesis and sacramental liturgy. However, it remains true that, in Gregory's view, the sacrament is still a partial fulfilment of sacrifice, with the offering of saved souls (among them, one's own) being the authentic priestly sacrifice. As already noted (§2.1.3.1), Gregory's interpretation of priesthood does assign metaphysical value to ascesis.

One of the recurring themes of Rapp's study on the episcopate in late antiquity is the interplay between an honorific view of the episcopate and a functional one. Canonical documents and theological reflection, at least until the fourth century, tried to instil the functional view of these roles, following Paul, who defined the episcopate (ἐπισκοπή) as a ἔργον (1Tim. 3:1)[72]. As the importance of bishops and priests in the community grew, the orders were increasingly seen as honours (τιμαί), which could be assigned, for example, to holy men and ascetics, without requiring them to exercise any service in the community, but only as a recognition of their spiritual authority[73]. As should be clear from the texts already analysed, neither Gregory nor Ephrem shares this view; rather, they emphasise the duties of the bishop towards the faithful. However, this does not exclude that the bishop's role is endowed with a certain honour and that, consequently, it should be bestowed according to spiritual merit.

In Ephrem's case this results in a series of passages in which the episcopate appears as the reward for the holiness of its recipient. These passages are all in the poems on Abraham (*CN* 17–21), so that they are likely meant to defend Abraham's elec-

68 On Origen's view of priesthood: Daniélou 1948, 56–63; Crouzel 1985, 287–290; Rapp 2005, 35–36, 63–5.

69 Gautier 2002, 115–116.

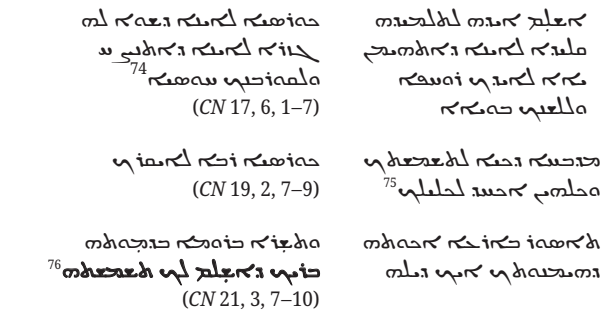
70 *or.* 2, 95, 1–98, 2, which clearly refer to ascetic retreat *before* taking office, perfectly in line with Gregory's ideas of asceticism and priesthood as presented by Gautier in the same and the previous chapters of his book.

71 Gautier 2002, 115 quotes in particular *or.* 26, 16.

72 In the Peshitta, the text has *qaššīšūtā* for ἐπισκοπή and *ʿbādē* (at the plural!) for ἔργον.

73 Rapp 2005, 90–91, 135, 138–141, 166–168, 203–207.

tion from objections of the people or of other, more experienced, clerics. Here are the passages:


(*CN* 17, 6, 1–7)

(*CN* 19, 2, 7–9)

(*CN* 21, 3, 7–10)

In these passages, powers (*CN* 21) and insignia (*CN* 17 and 19) of the episcopate are handed down to Abraham by Valgash, because Abraham is the best candidate for the job, being a trusted disciple of the previous bishop (*CN* 17, 6, 1; 3; *CN* 21, 3, 9) and a saintly man (*CN* 17, 6, 4). Interestingly, besides the symbols of pastoral leadership I have already analysed[77], Ephrem recalls in this context the priestly role of the bishop. The language is very clear: Ephrem speaks of *tešmeštā*, literally meaning "service", but with the specialised sense of "liturgy" (*CN* 19, 2, 7; *CN* 21, 3, 10); he uses the term *qurbānā*, literally "offering", but normally employed for "Mass", and *madbḥā*, which clearly alludes to liturgy. The term *ruḥḥāpā*, literally meaning "brooding", "hovering", has a fundamental importance in the sacramental doctrine of the Syriac churches; hence the fact that Abraham's hand is apt to *ruḥḥāpā* (*CN* 17, 6, 5) concretely means that he is worthy to administer the sacraments—baptism, Eucharist, and orders[78]. In these passages, the ministering of sacraments is put on par with pastoral care among the tasks of the bishops, and, just like leadership, it is considered honourable, so that only one worthy of it can be its recipient. Indeed, the impersonal expression "it is meet" (*yāyē*) at *CN* 17, 6, 5–7 and the nominal sentence at *CN* 19, 2, 7–9 convey a sense of inevitability, as if the conferral of sacramental powers were to follow personal holiness automatically. However, although these formulations presuppose great honour for the bishop's functions and the need for the recipient to be worthy of this honour, they

74 "He delivered his hand [*'īd-eh*] to his own disciple, / the seat [*kursyā*] to the one who was worthy [*šwē*] of it, // the key [*qlīdā*] to the one who was faithful [*d-'ethaymen*], / the pen [*gezrā*] to the one who was excellent [*d-'etnaṣṣaḥ*]; // meet for your hand is the consecration [*yāyē l-'īd-āk ruḥḥāpā*], / for your offering the atonement [*wa-l-qurbān-āk ḥussāyā*], // and for your tongue the comfort [*wa-l-lešān-āk buyyā'ā*]."

75 "The pure altar for your ministry [*madbḥā dakyā l-tešmešt-āk*], / the great seat for your honour [*kursyā rabbā l-'īqār-āk*], // and everything as one for your crown!"

76 ". . .you can bind on earth like him, / and you can loose on high in his manner, // since your faith is like his. / **Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry** [*tešmešt-eh*]**!**"

77 For the analysis of the seat, keys, binding and loosing, and the hand, see §2.2.4.6.

78 For the meaning of *ruḥḥāpā*: Brock 2000, 181–185; Brock 2001, 393–397.

should not be read as implying that the episcopate is a honorific title; rather, they must be read, together with *CN* 21, 3, 10, as persuading the audience that the very concrete task of bishop has been assigned to the right person: in *CN* 21 this is expressed by a reference to the divine choice of the candidate[79], whereas in *CN* 17 and 19 Ephrem's formulation suggests a natural and necessary link between the task and the recipient, a link mediated by sanctity—the personal sanctity of the candidate, the sanctity of the priestly office.

As already seen, material charity is not the prime focus of Ephrem's poetry on bishops. However, this does not mean he never ascribes the cause of material benefit for the community to the bishops. It is remarkable that Ephrem makes this ascription not in connection with the bishop's call to charity, but to his priestly and mediatory role: in other words, the main avenue for the bishop to acquire benefits for his faithful is intercessory prayer. In the context of the poems on Nisibis, the material benefit implied is protection from war or defeat:

4 …
ܕܝܗܒ ܒܩܝܐ ܒܒܘܩܝܗ ܥܒܕܗ ܫܘܪܐ ܠܣܓܝ̈ܐܐ
ܢܗܐ ܨܘܡܟ ܙܝܢܐ ܠܐܪܥܢ ܨܠܘܬܟ ܣܟܪܐ ܠܡܕܝܢܬܢ
ܦܝܪܡܟ ܢܩܢܐ ܠܬܪܥܘܬܐ ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܩܕܫ ܕܒܚ̈ܬܟ
…

5 …
ܐܩܝܡܟ ܐܝܟ ܥܡܘܕܐ ܒܒܝܪܬܐ ܕܥܡܐ ܪܬܝܬܐ
ܒܨܠܘ̈ܬܟ ܡܣܬܡܟ ܒܪܝܟ ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕܟ ܥܡܘܕܢ[80]
(*CN* 17, 4, 5–10; 5, 7–10)

20 ܨܠܘܬܟ ܬܦܝܣ ܠܫܡܝܐ ܬܦܝܣ ܒܡܪܗ ܬܪܥܘܬܐ
ܢܛܪ ܡܪܗ ܕܫܡܝܐ ܠܬ̈ܠܬܗ ܥܠ ܒܝܫܘܬ
ܘܒܥ̈ܘܗܝ ܥܠ ܒܢ̈ܬ ܘܟܘܢܫܗ ܥܠ ܒܘܕܪ

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[79] Admittedly, the turn of phrase would suggest that the subject of line 10 is the same third-person masculine singular as the three preceding lines (Simon Peter, mentioned at *CN* 21, 3, 6). However, line 10 is not part of the stanza in the same way as the other lines, because in this metre the last (tenth) line of the stanza works as a refrain. The refrains change in every stanza, but their form is consistent, presenting the predicate *brīk* (occasionally completed with the subject pronoun *hu*) and a relative clause expanding on why the subject is "blessed". All such refrains, in the totality of *CN* 17–21, refer to God as subject. Therefore, in this case, too, the refrain should be read as an independent clause after a full stop, referring to God and not to Peter. For the relationship between Ephrem's idea of divine choice of the bishops and the refrain-structure of his poems, see §3.3.1.

[80] "Because of his personal trial [*beqyā*], / he made him a wall to the multitude: // may your fasting [*ṣawm-āk*] be an armour to our land, / your prayer [*ṣallūt-āk*] a shield for our city, // your thurible [*pīrm-āk*] may obtain reconciliation [*tarʿūtā*]. / **Blessed is he who sanctified your sacrifices** [*debḥātā*]**!** /// [. . .] he put you as a pillar [*ʿammūdā*] / in the citadel of a quivering people, // that relies on your prayers [*ṣallwāt–āk*]. / **Blessed is he who made you our pillar!**"

ܡܫܒܚ ܫܒܚ ܠܡܪܝ ܫܡܝܐ ܘܥܡ ܥܢܢܐ ܢܚܬ ܡܛܪ ܛܒ ܥܠ ܒܝܫܬܢ
ܘܥܡ ܡܫܒܚ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܥܠ ܥܡ ܡܫܒܚ ܡܫܟ ܠܚܘ
...
23 ܘܒ ܠܟ ܡܫܒܚ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܥܠ ܥܡ ܡܫܒܚ ܡܫܟ ܠܚܘ[81]
(*CN* 21, 20; 23, 1–2)

In these texts, benefit from God is acquired through the bishop's prayer (*ṣallūtā*), with the only exception being *CN* 17, 4, 7, where the ascetic practice of fasting (*ṣawmā*) should protect the city, although it is remarkable that even in this case fasting is coupled with prayer. Prayer was required of all Christians, and in principle any prayer could be effective, provided the person praying was saintly enough. Why did Ephrem deem the bishop's prayer particularly important? Because the bishop could offer prayers other Christians could not offer: this is clarified by Ephrem's reference to the "thurible" or "censer" (*pīrmā*). For the offering of incense is a very rich image, pointing not only at the biblical usage of comparing prayers to the smoke of incense rising to God but also to the concrete offering performed by the priest in Old Testament times and perpetuated by the church, even in Ephrem's time[82]. Hence, the mention of the censer explains the importance of the bishop's prayer: only the bishop, as true heir of Hebrew priesthood, could offer a sacrifice to God, meaning the Eucharist, during which also incense was burnt[83]. This is confirmed by line 10 of the same stanza, where God is praised for having "sanctified" (*qaddeš*) the "sacrifices" (*debḥātā*) of the bishop, a clear eucharistic reference. Moreover, the result of the bishop's prayer is qualified as "reconciliation" (*tar'ūtā*), a word with distinct eucharistic overtones[84]. Therefore, the bishop's prayer, conveyed and embedded in these solemn rites, was far more valuable and effective than that of

81 "May your prayer rise to the sky / and may rise with it reconciliation; // may the Lord of the sky rain / his bounties on our wickedness, // and his comforts on our grieves, / and his collecting on our dispersion; // may he guard his zeal with his love / our shame may his justice avenge, // our wickedness may his mercy blot out. / **Blessed is he who blessed his flock!** /// ... Let the priests pray for the kings / that they may be a bulwark for humanity"

82 Aaron offered incense in a thurible (*pīrmā*) to save Israel from a pestilence at Num. 17:11. Incense was offered twice a day by *kohanīm*: Ex. 30:7–8; 2Chron. 13:11; in the Day of Atonement: Lev. 16:12–13.

83 In the OT, when flour is offered, it is required to add oil and frankincense upon it: Lev. 2:1. If we add this offering of bread and incense together to the offering of incense on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12–13), linked to the Mass ever since Hebr. 9 (see esp. Hebr. 9:3–4), the relevance of incense for the Mass should be evident. The so-called "Ecclesiastical Canons", or "Canons of the Apostles", in *Const. apost.* 8, preserved in Syriac in the third book of the Clementine Octateuch, set rules for the offerings at Mass, implying that, beside bread and wine, also oil for the lamps and incense were brought and employed in the rite: τῷ καιρῷ τῷ δέοντι πλὴν νέων χίδρων ἢ σταφυλῆς μὴ ἐξὸν ἔστω προσάγεσθαί τι πρὸς τὸ θυσιαστήριον (*madbḥā*), καὶ ἔλαιον εἰς τὴν λυχνίαν καὶ θυμίαμα (*besmē*) τῷ καιρῷ τῆς θείας ἀναφορᾶς (*qurbānā*) (*Const. apost.* 8, 47, 3). At Apc. 5:8 incense is explained as "the prayers of the saints", an image already employed at Ps. 141:2.

84 See its use in the christological passages Rom. 5:10–11; 11:15; 2Cor. 5:18–19, where Christ is the sacrificial victim for the "reconciliation" with God of all mankind. Ephrem employs the word in relation to the Eucharist: *ḥymn. virg.* 4, 10, 6–7 (with the expression *qurbān tar'ūtā*, "propitiation offering"); *ḥymn.*

any other member of the community. Naturally, this does not exclude the possibility that the bishop would be a saint, if he wants his prayers to be heard; rather, it is implied that he is bishop *because* he is a saint. This is the sense of *CN* 17, 4, 5–6, stressing the thoroughness of the bishop's preparation and the rightness of his selection.

The aims and results of the bishop's prayer are, as noted, remarkably concrete. Ephrem's imagery makes clear that the bishop's intercession serves to protect the city from external threats: the bishop is called "a wall" (*šūrā*, *CN* 17, 4, 6) or "a pillar" (*ʿammūdā*, *CN* 17, 5, 7), his fasting "an armour" (*zaynā*, *CN* 17, 4, 7), his prayer "a shield" (*sakkrā*, *CN* 17, 4, 8), and the beneficiary is always a collective, whether it be "the multitude" (*saggīē*, *CN* 17, 4, 6), "the land" (*ʾatrā*, *CN* 14, 4, 7), "the city" (*mdīttā*, *CN* 17, 4, 8), or "the people" (*ʿammā*, *CN* 17, 5, 8). That defence should be the aim of the bishop's prayer is explicitly stated in *CN* 21, 23, 1–2, where Ephrem recommends that the bishops—here significantly named "priests" (*kāhnē*)—pray for the military success of the emperors. In this insistence on protection and defence we can read a trace of the traumatic war experiences of the Nisibenes in the fourth century, a perspective completely different from that of the relatively sheltered Gregory.

Yet there is more than that here: as we shall see in detail later (§4.1.2), Ephrem offers a theological interpretation of this experience. The hardships of war are at the same time a punishment for the city's collective sins and a pedagogical device for the spiritual progress of the community. On the other hand, peace and tranquillity are granted by God when the community has reached its maturity or as a sign of mercy and forgiveness. The idea is perfectly encapsulated in line 6 of *CN* 21, 20: "His collecting [*kunnāšā*] on our dispersion [*buddārā*]". Its literal meaning is that God gathers anew the dispersed inhabitants of Nisibis after the hardships of Julian's reign. However, the sentence has a moral connotation, too: *kunnāšā* may be taken as "reconciliation", "concord," and *buddārā* as a metaphor for moral dispersion, given its position parallel to "wickedness" (*bīšūtā*, 4). Dispersion and wickedness are the same thing; the reuniting of the city depends upon the reconciliation of God. In this great scheme of things, the bishop has the critical role of intercessor, who through his prayer can elicit God's change of approach towards the community. This constellation of themes around the bishop's priesthood has its roots in Bible narratives where the holy man, whether a prophet or a priest, is able to summon God's help for Israel, thereby granting military victory. More deeply, the Bible assumes time and again that Israel's destiny depends on preserving the correct religious practices and beliefs.

To wrap up this section, the passages here examined conform by and large to the characteristics already highlighted in the lexical analysis (§2.1.3). Both Ephrem and Gregory highlight the liturgical role of the bishop and its link with moral purity when they want to uphold or undermine the legitimacy of a prelate. Ephrem stresses the holi-

parad. 13, 1, 10–11 (where the *qurbānā* is poetry, but it is clearly compared to a form of sacrifice that should meet God's "benevolence").

ness of sacraments to legitimise the newly elected Abraham, who is worthy of administering them. The priesthood is not thereby equated with an honorary title, but the correspondence between holiness of the office and holiness of the recipient serves to highlight the divine choice on which the bishop's power is based. Gregory, on the contrary, insists on holiness when he wants to elicit outrage at the moral lows reached by the bishops.

In Gregory's texts we have noticed a tendency to limit the importance of sacramental priesthood. The counterpart of this limitation is the transfer of priestly imagery and words to describe asceticism and spiritual endeavour, especially in autobiographical passages. This rhetorical strategy may be connected to his forceful criticism of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and at the same time the need to reestablish his own legitimacy as a bishop. However, it is not only rhetoric on the part of Gregory: his theology of priesthood is deeply indebted to Origen's, so that a certain limitation of the liturgical role in favour of spiritual values is surely at work here.

Here again we observe a remarkable difference between Gregory and Ephrem. Both preserve the tradition of the bishop as Old Testament priest and mediator before God for his people; however, they explain it differently. If for Gregory mediation is first of all the communication of God's image to the community, for Ephrem episcopal intercession has benefits which are very much material: the prosperity of the community in a time (and geographic space) of wars. As often happens in a case of divergence, Ephrem subscribes to a more traditional and biblically based view, whereas Gregory draws from Origen's thought and example.

3.1.3 Spiritual father I: The *munus docendi*

Among the names and metaphors examined in the previous chapter (§2), the great majority and the most important ones referred to the bishop's leadership of the community: not only terms of leadership proper but also important metaphors, such as that of shepherd, of husbandman, or of father, single out this feature of the prelate. Furthermore, the group of "iconographic" metaphors (§2.2.3) refer to the bishop's duty to set a moral example, which can be subsumed in the category of spiritual guidance. Accordingly, our texts contain a wealth of references to and discussions of different facets of this episcopal task.

In the next two sections I will examine how Gregory and Ephrem articulate the bishop's leadership in texts in which they describe the bishop in his role as leader, and I will note the context in which they have him act and what kind of character emerges from their treatment of the theme. In this treatment I have decided to separate the bishop in his quality of doctrinal teacher from the bishop as custodian of morality, discipline, and spirituality in the community. In the two poets the two roles receive remarkably different treatments. I will begin by stressing the importance of leadership compared to other traits of the bishop's figure for both poets and how they argue for such importance by situating the bishops in a concrete historical context (§3.1.3.1). The two poets have two

different approaches to the question of the bishop's position in history, but they both use it to advocate for their stance towards his office: Gregory underlining the necessity of doctrinal preparation for the bishop, Ephrem downplaying it in favour of good morals. Next, I will delve into Ephrem's downplaying of doctrinal teaching (§3.1.3.2): like charity, which was a peculiar characteristic of Babu, preaching and doctrinal knowledge end up being peculiar characteristics of the third bishop, Valgash. As such, they are praised and exalted when Valgash is to be defended, but, overall, they are limited in scope and validity. The second half of this section (§3.1.3.3) is occupied by a close reading of Gregory's discussion of the intellectual prerequisites for the bishop, in which Gregory makes clear how much theological competence is important for his view of the prelate.

In the following section (§3.1.4), I will examine the bishop as moral leader. First, I will look again at the historical narrative pushed by Gregory, this time in the narrative part of II, 1, 13 (§3.1.4.1). Then, I will present what little Gregory has to say on the content of this moral leadership, with reference to a list of vices in II, 1, 17, which in part anticipates the systematisation of Evagrius (§3.1.4.2). As regards Ephrem, on the contrary, many passages refer to moral leadership, in particular the correct style and modes of leadership the bishop should use (§3.1.4.3). In this respect two preoccupations stand out: (1) the ambiguous place of meekness and humility, sometimes limited to one particular character and at other times employed for the episcopate as such; (2) the correct order of speaking—that is, the regulation of expressions by the bishop and his scrutiny over them, to avoid rash choices and, in particular, slanderers. Finally, I will look at the contents of Ephrem's moral pedagogy (§3.1.4.4). Here greed and its repression will play a role, and I will explain why. Then, I will present texts in which Ephrem upholds an array of ascetic virtues for the bishop and the community, as a kind of bridge to the next part of the chapter (§3.2).

3.1.3.1 Leadership and church history

The importance of leadership goes deeper than a simple question of quantity of names or stress laid upon different themes. Spiritual leadership is at the core of our poems. Indeed, if both poets did not believe that the fundamental role of the bishop was guiding the faithful towards God, the poems would be meaningless. Both poets try to enjoin the bishops, albeit with different means and in different contexts, to a set of behaviours. Why are these behaviours desirable, if we were to exclude spiritual leadership? Material charity or civic leadership may have required such behaviours, but, at this time, those tasks were still largely reserved for state officials or lay notables, so that there would not have been any reason to address the head of the Christian community in particular or as such. Sanctity was required from every Christian, and, as Rapp notes, in the first centuries Paul's recommendations to Timothy on the choice of the bishop were interpreted as applying to every Christian[85]. If the same convictions had lain at the basis

85 Rapp 2005, 32–41.

of Gregory's and Ephrem's poems, the idea of poems specifically devoted to bishops would have made no sense: it is no accident that prose treatises, as well as poems, on priesthood began to be written only in the fourth century. In principle, liturgical priesthood may have called for treatments of the bishop's behaviour outside liturgy, as the belief in the sanctity of ritual action inspired by Old Testament typology could have raised—and did in fact raise—the need for "pure", "holy" ministers. In fact, however, spiritual leadership was so important that it subsumed the administration of sacraments in itself: this is particularly clear in the case of Gregory's II, 1, 12, 751–760, where the Eucharist is described almost as a provisional sacrifice, which will be fulfilled in the bishop's offering of the souls of his community. Moreover, the practice of penance and admission to the Eucharist or to baptism blurred the line between liturgical leadership and spiritual or disciplinary care. No doubt, the need for pure liturgical ministers, or the necessity to defend the purity of existing ministers before the community, is part of the poems' concerns—those of Ephrem in particular—but they are by no means the main concern.

The necessity of addressing the question of leadership—and, hence, of bishops—emerges clearly in Gregory's poems, both in its doctrinal implications and in its moral ones. The doctrinal implications are explored in particular in II, 1, 12:

Ἀλλ' οὐ κάκιστα ταῦτα οὐδ' ἐπισκοπῆς,
Ὦ λῷστε; μὴ τοσοῦτον ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν,
Ὡς τηλικοῦτο πρᾶγμα τιμᾶσθαι κακῶς,
Μηδ' εἰ λίαν τὸ χθαμαλὸν σπουδάζεται·
Οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἡ ἐπισκοπή. Χρεών
Πάντως τιν' εἶναι τῶν [δ'] ἀρίστων ἐκλέγω
Τὸν πρῶτον· εἰ δ' οὖν, ἀλλὰ μὴ τὸν ἔσχατον,
Εἴπερ νομίζεσθαί τι δεῖ μου τὸν λόγον,
Καὶ νῦν μάλιστα ἐν ζάλῃ γλωσσαλγίας
Καὶ τῶν μεγίστων ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων,
Ὧν καὶ μενόντων ἀσφαλῶς κέρδος πλέον,
Καὶ μὴ μενόντων, ἡ βλάβη πληρεστέρα·
Ὧν δὴ χάριν σοι τοὺς καλοὺς ἐκλεκτέον.
Μόλις γὰρ ἄν τις τῶν μέσων οὕτω τύχοι,
Εἰ σφόδρ' ἀγωνίζοιτο, τοὺς καλοὺς κρατεῖν.
Οὕτω γινώσκειν γνώμονος ἀψευδεστάτου.
(II, 1, 12, 176–191)

Are not all these things awful, especially for a bishop,
my good friend? Let's not be so old-fashioned
as to wrongly approve such a situation,
not even if we zealously pursue humility.
The episcopate is not the least of things. Since it should
definitely be reserved for the best ones, I would choose
the very first; if not, at least let him not be the last.
If my opinion should find some acceptance,

especially now, in this squall of raving tongues,
and enormous cities and congregations, (185)
which, if they can keep firm, are a greater gain,
but, if they don't persevere, the loss is even greater;
according to it, then, you should be choosing the good,
for a mediocre man could barely manage,
even with serious effort, to equal the good. (190)
Only a most truthful observer can take such a stance.

In this terse passage, Gregory sets forth his historical analysis of the situation of the episcopate. The historical approach is revealed by two expressions: at 177, ἀρχαίως φρονεῖν, "to think in an old-fashioned way", and at 184, καὶ νῦν μάλιστα, "especially now". These words imply a chronological difference between an ancient "before" and a new situation, requiring new ways of thinking. In context, since this passage follows a tirade on the lowly background of contemporary bishops (see §5.2.1), the theme is the background and education of the candidates to the episcopate. In fact, the "old-fashioned" way is characterised by "humility" (τὸ χθαμαλὸν), meaning not so much a spiritual or behavioural feature as a social station. In principle, says Gregory (180–182), the role of bishop should always be given to the best people (τῶν ἀρίστων), because the role itself is endowed with a certain worth or authority: οὐ γὰρ κάκιστον ἡ ἐπισκοπή, expressed with a sarcastic litotes. However, this principle is especially true in that historical juncture (καὶ νῦν μάλιστα): Gregory is saying that in the past, personal holiness was enough to make a good bishop—in the background lies the example of the apostles—but in his days culture (*paideia*) is also paramount and, since culture is very expensive, only "the best"—namely, the socioeconomic elites—may make good bishops.

The reason for this change of attitude is encapsulated in the expression ζάλη γλωσσαλγίας (184): this "squall of raving tongues" is a clear allusion to the doctrinal conflicts so prevalent in fourth-century Christianity. Ζάλη, meaning "squall", is frequently used as a metaphor for sudden and chaotic troubles (Pind. *Ol.* 12, 12). Apart from this obvious meaning of chaos and troubles, the word may be used for storms during navigation (Aeschyl. *Ag.* 656; Sophocl. *Ai.* 352), so that here it may suggest Gregory's beloved metaphor of the storm at sea (Lorenz 1979), particularly meaningful when the poet is talking of political collectives—such as the ἀστέων καὶ συλλόγων of line 185—because the metaphor latches on to the classical tradition of the ship of the state. The word γλωσσαλγία is part of a nautical metaphor in its first appearance at Eur. *Med.* 523–525[86]. The term is one of Gregory's keywords for heretical discourse, especially of the Eunomian persuasion, since skilful Eunomian argumentation lent itself to the accusation of being empty verbiage[87]. Therefore, according to Gregory, his time is so

86 ἀλλ' ὥστε ναὸς κεδνὸν οἰακοστρόφον / ἄκροισι λαίφους κρασπέδοις ὑπεκδραμεῖν / τὴν σὴν στόμαργον, ὦ γύναι, γλωσσαλγίαν. (Eur. *Med.* 523–525).

87 τὴν κατέχουσαν τῶν αἱρετικῶν γλωσσαλγίαν (*ep.* 41, 8); τίς ἡ τοσαύτη περὶ τὸν λόγον φιλοτιμία καὶ γλωσσαλγία; (*or.* 27, 7, a speech on the proper way to exercise theology, against Eunomius); αἴτιόν σοι

deeply defined by doctrinal conflict that candidates to the episcopate should be chosen according to their theological proficiency, which essentially means their education[88]. The silent premise of this analysis is that the bishops are the main actors of theological conflicts, since they should be the highest doctrinal authority in their community: if it weren't for this premise, Gregory's argument would lose much of its force, and the poem itself would be ultimately meaningless.

Poem II, 1, 12 is not the only place where Gregory presents this historical analysis: as Susanna Elm has shown, it is the main theme of *or.* 6, where he tries to justify his father's signature on the Arian creed of Rimini/Constantinople. The argument goes thus: Gregory the Elder signed the creed through inadvertence, being misled by the sophistication of the Trinitarian debate and by his lack of specific philosophical competence. This lack of competence is not in itself negative, because it is the vestige of simpler times, when Christians were less prone to doctrinal divisions and simplicity was valued above all. However, times have changed, and Christians have become more divided and contentious, while the debate has got more and more sophisticated. Therefore, it is necessary that future bishops be professional philosophers, which means ascetics[89]. Interestingly, the argument in *or.* 6 is employed to relativise the importance of a socioeconomically elite status in the choice of a bishop in favour of renunciation and *paideia*. In II, 1, 12, on the contrary, the argument excludes people of humble status and stresses the importance of an elite status in the choice of a bishop. The two usages are contradictory only if one forgets Brown's analysis of the authority of bishops, which highlights that sacrifice and renunciation are sources of authority only insofar as one has something substantial to renounce: poverty as a choice, not as a condition, commands authority[90].

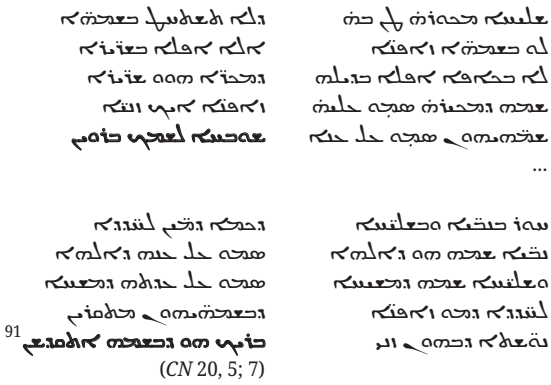
It is worth noting that Gregory's historical analysis, though fascinating, need not correspond to historical reality; it is his personal interpretation of the ecclesiastical situation, and, though we need not doubt Gregory's sincerity in espousing it, we should also keep in mind that it serves his rhetorical point—namely, to defend Gregory the Elder in *or*. 6 and to criticise his peers at II, 1, 12. Other stances with regard to doctrinal controversies were possible; in fact, Ephrem's poems do show a different historical perspective. This can be easily seen when one reads *CN* 20, the poem Ephrem devotes to the bishop's duties concerning heresy and the defence of orthodoxy:

γίνεται βλασφημίας, καὶ τῆς περιττῆς ταύτης γλωσσαλγίας καὶ ἀσεβείας (*or.* 31, 21, to those denying the divinity of the Spirit, and note that βλασφημία and ἀσεβεία are functionally equivalent to "heresy"); Ἰουδαῖοι σκανδαλιζέσθωσαν, Ἕλληνες διαγελάτωσαν, αἱρετικοὶ γλωσσαλγείτωσαν (*or.* 38, 2).

88 Elm 2000a, 85 (on the model of the pagan philosopher and the physician); Elm 2012 demonstrates how Christian doctrinal disputes presupposed classical *paideia* and were in fact often disputes *internal* to classical culture, albeit in a Christian clothing.

89 I am broadly summarizing Elm 2000a.

90 Brown 1992, 74–75.



(*CN* 20, 5; 7)

In the last stanzas of this poem (5 and 7), Ephrem compares and contrasts the behaviour of the apostles—in particular, Peter and Paul—with that of heretics, in order to show how a good bishop should behave. It is clear that Ephrem finds the apostles' example paramount in the doctrinal struggles and that heresy has not essentially changed from apostolic times. In fact, the discourse on names he develops in this stanza comes directly from Paul's dealings with congregational division in Corinth and is by no means isolated in Ephrem's oeuvre; on the contrary, it is a standard theme of his antiheretical writings[92]. Furthermore, Ephrem explicitly declares in stanza 7 that the apostles are in the same condition with the church as the prophets with Israel, while the heretics are likewise all similar. Nowhere does he suggest that heresy, or its skilful expression, is a novelty. The typological relationship between prophets and apostles is prolonged in the bishops, who consequently should be similar to the former. It is also remarkable that Ephrem's static vision of heresy is paired with an approach to contemporary heretics very different from Gregory's. Faced with doctrinal disputes, Gregory advises that when his fellow churchmen choose bishops, they take into account the candidates' theological proficiency. On the other hand, Ephrem prefers deeds over words in a bishop's magisterium, criticises heretics by saying that the very premise of approaching God through reason leads to heresy, and asks

91 "The Apostle [*šlīḥā*] [Paul], her matchmaker [*mākōr-āh*], had zeal / that she may not be violated by names, // not only by fake names, / but not even by the trustworthy ones, // nor Peter's [*b-kēpā*] nor even his own name; / those that were trustworthy matchmakers [*mākōrē šarrīrē*] // gave her the name of her Betrothed [*mkīr-āh*]; / the fake ones as adulterers [*zēpānē 'a(y)k zannāyē*] // put their own names on the flock. / **Glory to your name, Our Creator!** /// … Look to the prophets and the apostles [*ba-nbī'ē w-ba-šlīḥē*], / how much they resemble [*dāmēn*] each other! // 'Twas the name of God the prophets / gave to God's people // and 'twas the name of Christ the apostles / gave to Christ's church; // even forgers [*zēpānē*] resembled [*dmaw*] each other, / since by their names were called // the churches that whored with them. / **Blessed is he in whose name we're sanctified!**"

92 1Cor. 1:11–16; 3:3–6. On the argument of names: Griffith 1999.

bishops—this can be read at *CN* 21, 23, 8—to *stop* theological inquiry altogether, comparing it to war[93].

3.1.3.2 Ephrem's anti-intellectualism and the *munus docendi*

Naturally, though they partly disagree on the means, both Gregory and Ephrem believe that the bishops are first of all actors in doctrinal struggles and that it is the bishop's responsibility to deal with these problems. In Ephrem, this is demonstrated by his employment, in the context of doctrinal struggles (*CN* 20, 4–5), of the metaphor of the matchmaker, highlighting the unique position of the bishop before the Christian community and, hence, his unique responsibility (see §2.2.4.2–3). Since Ephrem was a deacon and was personally involved in doctrinal struggles[94], it is by no means trivial to understand what behaviour he recommends to the bishop in respect to doctrinal struggles. Gregory was his own ideal bishop and could claim to write out of personal concern when he wrote of the responsibilities of the bishop, but one could sense a contradiction between Ephrem's engagement with doctrinal struggle (and moral discipline) and his ideas on the role of the bishop. The fact that he likely wrote with the permission—or even commission—of his bishop is not sufficient to explain this contradiction, because Ephrem's poems, even the doctrinal ones, are written with Ephrem's voice, not *in persona episcopi*. This means that *his* voice had a recognised and legitimate role, which did not coincide with that of the bishop.

Piecing together various clues already discussed, one can glean the relationship between the strong role of the deacon and the equally strong imagery associated with the bishop. First, there is the important role of deacons in the early church, and in the Syriac church in particular, most of all if they were—as Ephrem most probably was—associated with the *bnay qyāmā* (§1.2.1). Second, there is Ephrem's plea to the bishop to delegate part of his responsibilities (§3.1.1.1). Third, Ephrem stresses more than once that the bishop should teach more through his deeds than with the word. This is in keeping with Ephrem's criticism against contemporary theologians, in which he devalues theological speculations in favour of moral action[95]. Finally, there is Ephrem's argument concerning the "marks of the true church", among which apostolic succession through the bishop is paramount[96]. All these elements taken together suggest that Ephrem does not conceive theological rebuttal as an essential part of doctrinal struggles. In his view, it is much more important to keep the community united through discipline and obedience to the bishop, who is the token of unity by virtue of his apos-

93 "May the kings stop the battling [*taktūšā*], / may priests stop the inquiring [*ʿuqqābā*]: // Let dispute [*drāšā*] and war [*qēʾrsā*] cease!" (*CN* 21, 23, 7–9). On the terms *ʿuqqābā* and *drāšā*, Wickes 2015, 48–50.

94 The fundamental passage for this is *hymn. haer.* 56, 10.

95 Ephrem's stance face the Arian controversy and heresy in general is masterfully analysed by Wickes 2015, 19–52.

96 See in particular Griffith 1999.

tolic consecration. For this reason, the bishop is the main actor of theological division, because his personal worth and his pastoral abilities can make the difference between a united community and a split one. Ephrem sees theological rebuttal and discussion on the merits of a question as dirty work unworthy of the prelate: being endowed with apostolic authority, a bishop is unnecessarily lowered to the level of the heretics if he engages in a technical discussion. Ephrem himself employs the image of "dirtiness" for such tasks (§3.1.1.1). Naturally, one could not leave such questions utterly unaddressed, and here the lower and more specialised religious personnel[97] come in handy, because the bishop can always delegate one of them—especially if he is as talented and educated as Ephrem—to further the correct doctrinal agenda. This would not be a long stretch for a deacon or an ascetic—from his traditional role of secretary of the bishop and of catechist for new Christians: as secretaries, deacons were probably literate and privy to the political situation; as catechists, they were delegated with a teaching task. Naturally, the delegate was still and always beholden to the bishop, who had the ultimate responsibility for the doctrinal state of his community.

Anyway, Ephrem and Gregory, though sharing the idea of the bishop as main guarantor of doctrinal unity, have two different ideas about the doctrinal struggles of their time and the concrete role the bishops have to play in them: Ephrem's devaluation of speculative theology is impressive when compared to Gregory's emphasis on the ministry of λόγοι and his effort to construe the bishop's authority as that of a quasi-professional philosopher. However, it would be wrong to reduce Ephrem to a unilateral anti-intellectualism. The fact that he was very wary of theological speculation and its perils does not exclude the possibility that argument may have its role to play in the church, even if a limited one—and, after all, one could not explain Ephrem's sophisticated response to contemporary heresies otherwise. Moreover, his stance does not exclude *other* intellectual endeavours outside speculation, nor does he bar any and all discourse on God. This is even truer in the case of the bishop, who, as has already been said, was readily seen as a "teacher" (*rabbā*) in the Syriac tradition. Hence, Ephrem praises Bishop Valgash's ability as a preacher:

ܫܦܝܪ ܒܟܪܙܐ ܒܡܪܕܢܐ ܘܫܦܝܪ ܒܩܪܝܐ ܒܣܦܪܐ ܘܫܦܝܪ ܒܚܟܡܬܐ ܒܥܡܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܫܦܝܪ ܒܩܕܡ ܒܢܝ ܥܡܗ[98]
(*CN* 15, 8)

Since he must defend Valgash in front of the community (§4.2), Ephrem praises him, so that it is likely that what is said in these texts of Valgash corresponds to Ephrem's ideal

97 Apart from ascetics as the *bnay qyāmā*, who may not have always had educating functions, Ephrem's bishops had a number of lower clerics at their disposal, as the discussion at §2.2.1.4 and passages such as *CN* 21, 5 demonstrate, even if the poems do not care to represent a clear-cut hierarchy.

98 "He was excellent [*naṣṣīḥ*] among the preachers [*kārōzē*] / and he was learned [*spīr*] among the lectors [*qārōyē*] // and he was eloquent [*mill*] among the sages [*ḥakkīmē*], / he was chaste among his brethren // and he was venerable among his friends."

of a bishop. *CN* 15, 8 enumerates Valgash's virtues *before* he became a bishop; indeed, he became a bishop because of these qualities—which means that these qualities were sought after in a bishop. Each virtue is seen in the context of a category in the community.

As usual in Ephrem, it is difficult to discern whether these categories represent real institutions or just informal categories. In *CN* 15, 8, this seems to be the case. Ephrem mentions the lectors (*qārōyē*), who were the most important of the "minor orders". As regards the preachers (*kārōzē*), Ephrem seems to imply an institutional sense when, in the lines before, he describes how Valgash became one of them: "he became a leader [*rēšā*] already in his youth [*ba-z'ōrūtā*], // as he was made preacher [*'abdū*(*h*)*y kārōzā*] for the people." (*CN* 15, 7, 4–5). If one is made a preacher, then one cannot just be a preacher by way of personal virtue; hence, it is likely that this is an institution. But if in Ephrem's community the office of "preacher" is distinct from sacerdotal orders, then we face again Ephrem's tendency to remove doctrinal or learned tasks from the bishop to other figures, especially if these others came from the ranks of the ascetics[99]. The words "his brethren" (*'aḥ-ū*(*h*)*y*) and "his friends" (*ḥabbīb-aw*[*hy*]) in fact must be understood figuratively as "his equals", since it is likely that these are other members of the *bnay qyāmā*, as Valgash was (cf. *CN* 15, 9; §3.2.1). Only the reference to "sages" (*ḥakkīmē*) cannot be easily interpreted as a title.

The poet describes thereby Valgash's career before his election to the episcopate, and it is remarkable that his is a career defined by learning, since he had been reader and preacher. Furthermore, among the virtues ascribed to him, two are "intellectual" virtues—namely, learning (*spīr*) and eloquence (*mlīl*). Hence, Ephrem could appreciate a good and learned preacher.

Yet it is difficult to extract from his remarks on the theme the parameters that made a good preacher for him. A promising passage may be *CN* 14, 5–6:

...

4 ܟܝܢ ܕܒܥܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܒܗ ܟܝ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ

5 ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ
ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ
ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ

6 ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ
ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ
ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ[100] ܟܝ ܕܒܥ ܕܐܡ ܐܠܗܐ ܥܠ ܥܡܐ
(*CN* 14, 4, 5–6; 5–6)

99 For this tendency, see: Escolan 1999, 227–265.

100 "Now the last [Valgash] has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life [*ḥešlat-ḥayyē*]. /// Aaron had stripped the ears / of earrings [*qdāšē*], to make a calf, // a dead calf which mysteriously / once cold killed the encampment, // those who forged his horns / with his horns ripped up. /// Yet our third priest / pierced the heart's ears // and put earrings [*qdāšē*] forged / from the nails that were fixed // to the Cross where his Lord was crucified, / thereby saving his fellows."

These stanzas are introduced by a remark on Valgash having "put the jewel of life" in the ears of the people. This metaphor, inspired by Prov. 25:12[101], is clarified in stanzas 5 and 6, where Ephrem compares Valgash favourably with Aaron and develops the metaphor in a full-fledged typology: Valgash and Aaron correspond because both are characterised mainly as preachers; both use earrings, but Aaron takes them from the people and uses them to forge the golden calf, whereas Valgash forges them from the nails of the cross and gives them to the people; the earrings, the nails, and the calf correspond, because all three pierce, but the calf pierces to kill, whereas the nails of the cross pierce to save. The choice of this episode is likely prompted by the fact that Aaron is one of the Old Testament paradigms of the Jewish priest, but the fact that he is adduced as an example in relation to a bishop is surprisingly similar to his position as paradigmatic priest/bishop in the Latin tradition as opposed to Greek texts, which privilege Moses as paradigm for the bishop[102]. Anyway, the example of Aaron is ambiguous, because it can be played in a negative as well as in a positive way[103]. The negative foil he offers to Valgash does not reveal too much of Ephrem's desiderata for preachers, apart from the obvious: one should not preach other deities than God and Christ (as was the calf), whose death and resurrection—symbolised by the nails—is the centre of ecclesiastical preaching. If we are willing to read many things into the metaphor, the fact that the bishop's preaching is compared to earrings may indicate that—as did the calf and the nails—the bishop's words should "pierce" his audience—namely, unsettle them, rebuke them, or hit their weak spots, remaining there, as a nail or an earring, and bringing adornment—which, in Ephrem's language, means ascetic discipline (§3.2.1). It is doubtful that a learned discussion of, say, the *homoousios* would have had this kind of effect on the congregation at large. The idea that the Christian proclamation should focus on the cross and that this focus will and should scandalise the audience is prominent in Paul[104]. If Paul's passages are specifically alluded to by Ephrem's metaphor of the nails of the cross, then the whole contrast between Aaron making the calf and Valgash making earrings can be read as the contrast between a preaching inspired by worldly

101 "As an earring [*qdāšā*] of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise [*ḥakkīmē*] reprover upon an obedient ear." (Prov. 25:12).

102 On this difference: Rapp 2005, 131–132, who links it with two different conceptions of the church, with the Greeks conceiving it as endowed with a secular power, while the Latins perceived the church as an order different and opposed to the secular one. The difference between a political and a liturgical leader is perceived also in the Syriac area, if Murray 2006, 192–193 is right. For Ephrem, even if sometimes Moses received the priesthood through the imposition of hands and transmitted it to Aaron (*hymn. haer.* 22, 19; *Nat.* 4, 21), normally it is Aaron the first priest (*hymn. fid.* 8, 8; *hymn. eccl.* 11, 3; *CN* 53, 13; 48, 1).

103 Ephrem's prevailing tendency is to spare Aaron from criticism and to see him as a positive character: this is demonstrated by his treatment of the Golden Calf in the prose *Commentary on Exodus*, which is consistent with all other occurrences in the *madrāšē*; see Conway-Jones 2017. This means that the passage at *CN* 14 is somewhat unique, as it presents Aaron in a negative light, without redeeming qualities.

104 1Cor. 1:17–25; 2:1–5; 13–15; 1Thess. 1:5.

eloquence and sophistication and a preaching more in line with the Pauline ideology of the cross plain and simple, in all its scandal. Yet these reasonings are perhaps too speculative, and we should not draw too much from these lines.

Even in recognizing the goodness of Valgash's preaching, Ephrem maintains an ambiguous attitude to this gift. Indeed, interpreters such as Palmer have even cast doubts on Ephrem's sincerity in his praise of Valgash: such a praise was needed to defend the bishop from accusations of spinelessness, a flaw Ephrem would criticise in ecclesiastical leaders at *Homilies on Faith* 6, 195–198[105]. Obviously, historiography stops at the threshold of conscience, and there is no way to prove Palmer's claim on the sincerity of our poet. Anyway, it is clear from our texts that Ephrem links learning and preaching *particularly* to Valgash, whereas the other bishops are more rarely seen in their teaching function, and with consistently fewer intellectual connotations. One need only compare Ephrem's descriptions of Valgash—

3 ܡܪܝܐ ܕܒܪ ܫܘܠܦܐ ܕܚܟܡܬܐ ܚܪܬ ܐܦ ܫܘܠܦܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܙܪܥ ܒܗ ܫܘܠܦܐ ܕܒܪ ܫܘܠܦܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܙܪܥ ܒܗ ܫܘܠܦܐ ܕܒܪ ܫܘܠܦܗ ܕܐܝܟ ܡܪܒܐ ܕܙܪܥ ܒܗ

4 ܡܪܝ ܚܕ ܡܪܝ ܕܫܡ ܡܪܝ ܚܕ ܡܪܝ ܕܫܡ ...

24 ܡܪܝ ܕܐܡ ܠܐ ܡܪܝ ܕܐܡ ܡܪܝ ܕܐܡ

(*CN* 14, 3–4; 24)

105 Palmer 1998, 124–125. On the accusations against Valgash, see below §4.2. *Homilies on Faith* 6, 195–198 goes like this: "For a relaxed master [*rabbā rapyā*], the disciples / are of no comfort [*nyāḥā*]: // They take from him corruption / he takes from them stupefaction".

106 "The first tilled the earth with toil, / uprooting thence briar and thorns, // the middle enclosed her all around, / making her a hedge of redeemed, // the last opened the barn of his Master / and sowed in her the words of her Master /// The first priest by hand of fasting / had closed the gates of the mouths, // the second priest with the prisoners / had opened the mouth of the purses, // now the last has pierced ears / and put in them the jewel of life."

107 "Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she brings the labour [*ʿaml-eh*] of the first; // before the One loving the bountiful [*rāḥem yāhōbē*], / she brings the alms [*zedq-eh*] of the middle; // before the One judging the doctrines [*dāyen yullpānē*], / she brings the debating [*drāš-eh*] of the last."

with his description of instances of preaching from other bishops:

15 ܕܒܬܠܡܕ ܒܝܬ ܕܡܪܝ ܒܬܠܡܕ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܡܪܝ ܒܬܠܡܕ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܡܪܝ ܒܬܠܡܕ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܡܪܝ

16 ܕܒܫܦܝܠ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ

ܕܒܫܦܝܠ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ ܕܒܬ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܠܝܚ[108]

(*CN* 14, 15–16)

ܐܚܕ ܕܒܚܝ ܒܫܘܬ ܒܝ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ[109]

(*CN* 17, 5, 1–6)

ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ ,ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ ,ܒܝܬ ܕܒܫܘܬ ܕܒܪ ܒܝ[110]

(*CN* 19, 8, 5–10)

The stanzas taken from *CN* 14 tend to differentiate between the three first bishops, giving to each one of them a distinguishing feature. As already seen, Babu's feature is material charity, and—as will be delved into later—Jacob's focus is asceticism; Valgash stands out for his preaching and teaching. Ephrem does express this feature using terms which clearly denote intellectual refinement, but they are also morally ambiguous for him: at *CN* 14, 24, where Ephrem imagines Nisibis's eschatological account before God, Valgash's legacy is presented to the deity in her quality of "judge of doctrines" (*dāyen-yullpānē*), because it consists of "debating" (*drāšā*). The word *yullpānā* is, by itself, a *vox media*, capable of assuming both negative and positive connotations; however, Ephrem uses it in the singular when he is talking of correct doctrine, whereas

108 "The first, at the step of conversion [*tulmādā*], / adapted his speech [*maml-eh*] to his stage; // the middle, at the second step, / to his stage his sermon [*turgam-eh*] lifted; // the last, at the third step, / magnified his speech [*maml-eh*] in accordance. /// The first with all simplicity [*ba-pšīṭātā*] / gave milk [*ḥalbā*] to his infancy, // the middle with all brevity [*b-dallīlātā*] / gave a taste [*ṭ'ūmā*] to his childhood, // the third with all perfection [*ba-gmīrātā*] / gave food [*'uklā*] to his maturity."

109 "The shepherd, appointed from his herd, / fed it on spiritual meadows [*margē rūḥānā*], // and with his victorious staff [*ḥuṭr-eh naṣṣīḥā*] / from invisible wolves [*dēbē ksayā*] guarded it. // come on, fill the office of your teacher, / because there's thirst of the sound of his voice [*ṣawtā d- ne'māt-eh*]."

110 "Because you loved the misery / of your master, the inwardly rich [*d-rabb-āk 'attīrā kasyā*], // May the fountain of his word [*ma'yan mell-aw(hy)*] gush from you, / so that you become the Spirit's lyre, // and he sings [*tezmar*] to you in you his wills. / **Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!**"

the plural is found without attributes as an antonomasia for heretical doctrines[111]. The term *drāšā* in the *Hymns on Faith*, according to Wickes, never has a positive meaning[112]. Valgash is therefore characterised by an intellectualism that, while positive in his case, verges dangerously towards a mistaken approach to religion.

This is consistent with the characterisation of Valgash in *CN* 14, 15–16, where Ephrem confronts the teaching ministry of the three bishops, ranging them on a scale that goes from the simplest preaching of the first bishop, when the community was still in its first steps, to the magnificent and complete teaching of Valgash, when the community is finally capable of handling it. *CN* 14, 16 in particular is interesting. First of all, Babu's character, expressed in line 3 with the term *b-dallīlātā*—though in the context it obviously means that Babu began to teach deeper things (giving "a taste" of what was to come) but did so only briefly—may also be an allusion to a short tenure as bishop, giving the historian an important clue on the time frame of the episcopal tenures in Nisibis in the first half of the fourth century. Another interesting point is that *CN* 14, 16 is very similar to *CN* 14, 21:

ܚܝܐ ܕܒܟܪܘܬܗ ܝܠܕ ܒܬ ܫܠܝܐ ܕܛܥܡ ܠܛܠܝܘܬܐ
ܚܝܐ ܕܒܝܢ ܟܕ ܦܫܩ ܒܬ ܡܨܥܝܐ ܕܛܥܡ ܠܥܘܠܠܐ
ܚܝܐ ܕܒܣܘܦ ܐܬܬ ܒܬ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܕܛܥܡ ܠܓܒܪܘܬܐ[113]
(*CN* 14, 21)

Lines 2 and 4 of each stanza are practically identical, line 6 differs only by a word, meaning "his maturity" (or "perfection", *gmirūt-eh*) at stanza 16 and "her youth" (or "fortitude", *ʿlaymūt-āh*) at stanza 21. However, the metaphor of food to talk about instruction, stemming from such scriptural passages as 1Cor. 3:1–2; Hebr. 5:12–14; 1Petr. 2:2, is maintained in both stanzas. The oddly numbered lines maintain the same adjectives for the three bishops (*qadmāyā*/*kāhnā qadmāyā*; *meṣʿāyā/kāhnā meṣʿāyā*; *tlītāyā/kāhnā da-tlātā*), but change the determination: stanza 16 had a determination of mode, explaining how the bishops taught ("with simplicity," "with brevity," and "with perfection"), whereas stanza 21 gives the relationship between the community and each bishop according to the stage of growth the community is in. Jacob's "begetting" (*yiled*) means "founding", Babu's "explaining" (*targem*) is a verb used for "preaching a homily" and here means that Babu gave the first lessons to the community, whereas Valgash's "nurturing" (*tarsī*) indicates his giving solid food. If we are not to conjecture

111 Examples of positive occurrences of *yullpānā*: *comm. in diatess.* 4, 20; 5, 8; 12; 18; 6, 19; 21; 8, 7; *hymn. parad.* 6, 1, 1; *hymn. fid.* 12, 7, 2; 28, 15, 3 (here as an antonomasia *the* positive doctrine). Remarkable the neutral connotation of *hymn. fid.* 12, 2, in a stanza describing Christ's judgement of doctrines with eschatological overtones. Examples of *yullpānē* without attributes meaning "heresies": *comm. in Gen.* 1, 6; *hymn. fid.* 86, 2, 3; 20, 4; 12, 4. It is notable that the Syriac translator of the Acts in the Peshitta has always rendered Gr. αἵρεσις with *yullpānā*, something that it is not found in the other books of the NT.

112 Wickes 2015, 49.

113 "The first priest, who begot, / gave milk to her infancy; // the middle priest explained / and gave a taste to her childhood; // the third priest nurtured / and gave food to her youth."

that *tarsī* should be moved to line 3 and *targem* to line 5, then it will seem that Ephrem has inverted the usual characterisation of the bishops, with Valgash associated with material charity (nurturing), while Babu is linked to intellectual enterprises (explaining, interpreting). This is not so, because here the terms are employed figuratively to describe the spiritual growth of the community: Valgash's food is teaching (see §2.2.4.4). On a wider level, stanzas 16 and 21, although similar, are concerned with different themes: 16 is talking of the doctrinal growth of the community, because it comes after stanza 15 where the focus is on the bishops' words (*mellē*); 21, on the other hand, is concerned with the community's moral growth, as demonstrated by the many references in stanzas 18–20 to fear, discipline, but also encouragement and joy, delineating a path from compulsion through freedom.

All in all, this succession is no doubt schematic, but it puts Valgash's preaching in context, justifying Ephrem's emphasis on this aspect of the third bishop: no doubt, all bishops had preached and taught, but Valgash, from the vantage point of a community come to full maturity, could develop in all its depth and complexity the ecclesiastical teaching, making him *the* preacher among the three first bishops. This characterisation is reprised in the poems on Abraham, who is called to be a preacher as competent as Valgash: here, too, even though the successor is called to be similar to the predecessor, competent preaching remains something particularly linked with Valgash. Indeed, it is clear from the imagery that the object of Valgash's legacy to Abraham is preaching. At *CN* 17, 5, 6 and *CN* 19, 8 this is expressed through consistent reference to auditory phenomena: *ṣawtā* indicates the very act of perceiving with the ear, and only by derivation does it mean the "sound" of something; *ne'māt-eh* are pleasurable sounds—whether spoken or sung; the words, *mellē*, have naturally a sonic dimension, as well as the lyre, *kennārā*, and the act of singing, *zmar*. Moreover, at *CN* 17, 5 the mention of "spiritual meadows" (*margē ruḥānā*), "his victorious staff" (*ḥuṭr-eh naṣṣīḥā*), and "invisible wolves" (*dēbē ksayā*) suggests the image of the shepherd, while indicating through the attributes that the image should be read in reference to divine realities: then the meadows are Scriptures, and the wolves heretics snatching sheep from the flock (Act. 20:28–30), so that the shepherding must be understood as explaining Scripture, and the staff as polemic against heresy. The "inner" (*kasyā*, but also "hidden", "mysterious", "mystical") riches of *CN* 19, 8, 6 are the "treasure of words" (*gazzā d-mellē*) identified with Valgash at *CN* 17, 11, 8. Since, then, preaching is commended to Abraham only insofar as it expresses the rightful succession from the great preacher Valgash and not in itself, and granted that Valgash is more important than Babu, so that preaching is more important than material charity, yet competent preaching remains something of a secondary requirement for a bishop, desirable but not indispensable.

3.1.3.3 Gregory's didactic program: II, 1, 12, 263–329

In comparison to the limited role that doctrinal teaching and polemic has in Ephrem's view, one appreciates better the originality of Gregory's proposal for the

episcopate, with its historical diagnosis and his insistence on theological competence as a fundamental prerequisite for the bishop. The theme is greatly expanded upon in II, 1, 12 after the historical diagnosis already commented on: Gregory defends his view against the objection posed by the example of the apostles, who are normally represented as ignorant people, and then he goes on to state his proposal more completely[114].

Since the whole section is very long, I will summarise Gregory's defence and concentrate on the positive part. Gregory raises three points to counter the example of the apostles. The first point is the extraordinary faith demonstrated by the apostles, which reflected itself in the miracles they worked and in their exceedingly ascetic way of life. In presence of such a faith, Gregory acknowledges, learning can safely be ignored: spectacular ascesis and wonderworking are more credible tokens of soundness of doctrine than any carefully crafted argument[115]. Gregory is not explicit about it, but his tone and argument imply that no one could claim to resemble the apostles in his day and age. Moreover, using the apostles to excuse ignorance in the bishops is a logical fallacy: in the apostles it is not ignorance that is admired and praised, but faith; the fact that they were *also* ignorant does not grant that ignorance without faith is admirable[116]. The second point is that the apostles were ignorant only as regards their upbringing, but they were actually made wise in order to discharge their ministry, as the depth and wisdom of their writings demonstrate[117]. Since the apostles were made to participate in wisdom supernaturally, and notwithstanding their illiterate upbringing, it is clear that learning and wisdom are good and indeed necessary for the bishops, the heirs of the apostles. Granted, it was the Spirit who made the apostles wise, and not *paideia*, but this means that they were indeed wise and not ignorant, which is a negation of the premise of the example[118]. Third, if the Holy Spirit made the apostles wise and gave them the faculty of speaking, and if the unclean spirits are mute, as the Gospel of Matthew seems to imply (Mt. 9:32–33), then the one who advises bishops to be mute is possessed by an unclean spirit and not by the Spirit of God[119].

At this point, Gregory introduces his positive proposal. Gregory's argument employs all the weapons his classical upbringing and his Christian studies equipped him with in order to present his view of Christian culture, beginning with the necessity of such a culture (lines 276–294), continuing with its formal requirements (295–308), and defining in the end its contents (309–321). The whole passage is enclosed between a preface of general value (263–275) and a final exhortation (323–329). My analysis is divided

114 The objection of the apostles is treated at II, 1, 12, 192–264, whereas lines 265–329 present Gregory's proposal.
115 II, 1, 12, 199–215.
116 II, 1, 12, 216–229.
117 II, 1, 12, 230–244.
118 II, 1, 12, 245–253.
119 II, 1, 12, 254–263.

into three parts: first, I will consider Gregory's statements *against* classical culture; second, I will problematise his stance, pointing to the many loans from that same classical culture Gregory criticises. Through this ambiguity, the poet tries to delineate the peculiar position of Christian culture vis-à-vis pagan *paideia*. Finally, I will set Gregory's proposal in the tradition of ecclesiastical writers to show that his main model is Origen, although he develops it in an original way.

The preface (263–275), building upon the previous argument, which attributed to the apostles a form of wisdom (λόγος), introduces a fundamental distinction between the form (λέξις) and content (νοῦς) of knowledge, giving pride of place to content in the context of Christianity (ἡμῖν, 274). This apparently simple argument is, in reality, laden with tacit implications and allusions to existing debates and commonplaces both inside the Christian community and in the empire at large:

ὡς δέ τ' ἀληθὲς ἔχει
Φρονεῖν τ' ἄμεινον, συντόμως ἐγὼ φράσω.
Ἦσάν ποτ', ἦσαν εὐμαθεῖς, εἴπερ τινες,
Οὐκ εὐμαθεῖς δὲ τὸν εὐπρεπῆ πάντες λόγον.
Ἔχει γὰρ οὕτως· διττὸς ἡμῖν πᾶς λόγος,
Λέξεις τε καὶ νοῦς· αἱ μὲν οἷον ἔκτοθεν
Ἔσθημ', ὁ δ' ἔνδον σῶμα ἠμφιεσμένον.
Καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄμφω καλά, τοῖς δὲ θάτερον,
Ἤ αἰσχρὸν αὖθις—ὡς μάθησις ἢ φύσις.
Ἡμῖν δὲ τοῦ μὲν ἐκτὸς οὐ πολὺς λόγος,
Ὅπως ποθ' ἕξει, τοῦ δ' ἔσω λίαν πολύς·
Ἐν νῷ γάρ ἐστιν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτηρία,
Πλὴν ἐκλαλουμένῳ τε καὶ δηλουμένῳ.
(II, 1, 12, 263–275)

But let me say briefly
how things really are, and what is better to think.
They were, yea, they were well learned back then, of course,
but not well learned even in the pleasantries of speech,
because, here's the thing: our every speech is double,
the words and the meaning; the ones are like the outward
clothing, the other is the body clothed.
Someone has both good, others only one of them,
or finally both are bad, according to nature or nurture.
As regards us, the outside is not a big deal,
nor its conditions, while the inside is really important,
for in the meaning is our salvation,
if it's uttered and shown.

The use of νοῦς to indicate the meaning of a linguistic expression and of λέξις to indicate the expression itself, in its linguistic nature, is commonplace in classical literature[120].

120 See Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1180–1181 *s.v.* νόος with the example from Herodotus: οὗτος δὲ ὁ νόος τοῦ ῥήματος τὸ ἐθέλει λέγειν (Herodt. 7, 162, 2); Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1038 *s.v.* λέξις with the exam-

These two words are contrasted often by Plutarch, especially as he praises brachylogy, the ability to condense much "meaning" (νοῦς) in a few "words" (λέξεις). For Galen this distinction is an important exegetical tool[121]. Gregory is moving inside the categories of a polemic well known in the Imperial Age among pagan authors—namely, the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric. This question had obvious educational ramifications, because the inclusion or exclusion of rhetoric from the philosopher's curriculum (and of philosophy from the rhetor's) would influence not only the syllabus of texts studied but also the way in which texts might be studied and in which philosophical knowledge might be communicated[122].

These educational ramifications are not lost on Gregory, who conceives of the bishop—among other things—as a teacher (see §2.2.4.4). Apparently, Gregory's stance is an ascetic one: content is the only important thing, and as long as it is taught and communicated, anything goes. Furthermore, he seems even to despise the refinement of forms, since in line 266 he denies rhetorical prowess (τὸν εὐπρεπῆ λόγον) to the apostles, calling them "simple as regards speaking" (εὐτελεῖς τὰ τοῦ λόγου, 285), and in lines 295–308 he calls for the rejection of refined writing:

Πέζευέ μοι τὴν λέξιν, ἀγροικοστόμει, (295)
Οὐδὲν διοίσομ'· οἶδα καὶ βαίνειν κάτω.
Λιτὴ τράπεζα πολλάκις μοι φιλτέρα
Τῆς ὀψοποιῶν χερσὶν ἐξησκημένης.
Ἑσθὴς δ' ὁμοίως ὡς δὲ κάλλος εὐπρεπὲς,
Οὐχ ὃ γράφουσι χεῖρες, ἡ φύσις δ' ἔχει. (300)
Ὁ νοῦς ἀνείσθω, καὶ τόδ' ἡμῖν ἀρκέσει.
Οὐδὲν τὸ κομψόν, τοῖς θέλουσι δώσομεν.

ple from Polybius: προσαγορευομένους δὲ διὰ τὸ μισθοῦ στρατεύειν Γαισάτους: ἡ γὰρ λέξις αὕτη τοῦτο σημαίνει κυρίως (Polyb. 2, 22, 1). In general, λέξις seems slightly more specialised than νοῦς, since this appears in all genres with this meaning (and has also many other meanings), whereas λέξις, based on the dictionary entry, seems employed primarily in philosophical and rhetorical treatises.

121 οὕτως ὁ Φωκίωνος λόγος πλεῖστον ἐν ἐλαχίστῃ λέξει νοῦν εἶχε. (*vit. Phoc.* 5, 5, 1); *vit. Demosth.* 10, 3, 4; *garr.* 510E, 6; 511B, 4; *praec. ger.* 803E, 8; in Galen's exegetical works: Galen. *Hippocr. vict. morb. ac.* 15, 470, 6 (Kühn); *comm. in Hippocr. nat. hom.* 15, 82, 8 (Kühn); *comm. in Hippocr. epid.* 17b, 160, 8 (Kühn); 217, 6; 223, 3; *difficult. respir.* 7, 894, 17 (Kühn).

122 Von Arnim 1889, in particular 112–114. A fine example of this polemic is Synesius' *Dio*, as the dedicatory letter (*ep.* 154) shows; see also Op de Coul 2012. One can glimpse in Synesius' allusions a representation of the conflict similar to that of Gregory with Maximus: on one side, a landowning gentleman who came to philosophy by way of traditional *paideia* and, though claiming to be more authoritative than a simple educated *curialis*, does not want to completely discard his command of the language of *paideia*; on the other, a *parvenu* claiming divine authority on the basis of a radical lifestyle entailing the rejection of *paideia* in the name of *parrhesia*. The gentlemen (Synesius, Gregory) characterise the *parvenus* as rash (θράσος being a keyword (see Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 766 at §3.1.3.1) and immoderate in their ascent to God and their tendency to brag about it, whereas μετριότης, the right measure, is the gentleman's feature.

Μή μοι τὰ Σέξτου μηδὲ Πύρρωνος πλέκε·
Χρύσιππος ἔρροι, μακρὰν ὁ Σταγειρίτης.
Μηδὲ Πλάτωνος στέργε τὴν εὐγλωττίαν. (305)
Ῥίψον τὸ κάλλος, ὧν τὰ δόγματ' ἀποστρέφῃ.
Ἐμφιλοσόφει τῇ εὐτελείᾳ τοῦ λόγου.
Ἡμῖν ἀρέσκεις, κἂν ἀπαιδεύτως λαλῇς.
(II, 1, 12, 295–308)

Be the style pedestrian, the language coarse, (295)
I won't mind: I can walk lowly, too.
The frugal meal I oftentimes find dearer
than the one adorned by the hands of the cooks.
For the garment is the same: fair is the beauty
not feigned by hands, but inherent to nature. (300)
Be the meaning noble, and it will be enough.
Sophistication is vain, we leave it to those who like it.
Spare me Sextus and Pyrrho,
goodbye Chrysippus, far be the Stagirite from me,
don't grow fond even of Plato's eloquence. (305)
Renounce the ornaments of the doctrines you rejected.
Be philosopher, but with plain words
you'll please us even with unrefined talks.

This crucial passage can be divided into three sections: in 295–300, Gregory characterises his preferred style through three metaphors; 301–302, two sentences of general value, are a link to what follows—namely, the rejection of all pagan philosophers in 303–308. The perfect symmetry of this passage is notable: six lines, two lines as bridge, and then again six lines.

The rejection of pagan philosophers is topical in Gregory's oeuvre and expresses a polemical stance towards Greek tradition from inside that tradition more than a real condemnation. In our case this is demonstrated by two details, two meaningful omissions: Gregory rejects Sextus and Pyrrho (scepticism), Chrysippus (stoicism), Aristotle (Peripatetics), and Plato (Academy). However, he fails to mention Epicurus for Epicureanism and Diogenes for Cynicism; otherwise his list would be a complete rejection of Greek philosophy. The omission of Epicurus demonstrates that Gregory's rejection comes from inside the tradition: Epicureanism in Gregory's time was considered as a petty cover-up for licentiousness in the best case, outright atheism and sedition in the worst; if the poet wanted to sign an irrevocable sentence and present himself as an outsider, he would have thrown Epicurus in with the other philosophers, but by omitting him he recognised the philosophical consensus on Epicureanism, which deemed it fundamentally different from and worse than any other philosophy (thus not needing to be even mentioned). On the other side, failing to mention Diogenes, a person Gregory clearly admired[123], leaves the door open for a parallel between Cynicism and Gregory's

123 Greg. Naz. I, 2, 10, 218–227; Dziech 1925, 104n103; Krueger 1993, 39–42; Moreschini 2012, 114–115.

idea of philosophy. Indeed, Cynicism not only agrees with Gregory's teaching program involving uncouth language and consistency between life and doctrine, but it probably inspired this very trope of rejecting the dialectical trappings of other schools[124].

The flaw Gregory decries in these philosophers is not wholly clear, because even if the context and the reference to Plato's εὐγλωττία points to a refusal of literary qualities, one cannot say that Sextus and Pyrrho, Chrysippus and Aristotle were renowned for their style; rather, they were known for their logical and dialectical skill[125]. This means that, contrarily to our modern expectations, the logical and dialectical method adopted by philosophers is considered by Gregory more form than content, since it can be equated to literary style as something added to doctrine[126]: what Gregory refuses is summarised in the expression τὸ κομψόν (302), meaning "refinement" and applied to sophisticated and luxurious things as well as to skilful and ingenious ones. In Gregory, as well as in the other Cappadocians, it is a buzzword in the anti-Eunomian polemic, because Eunomius adopted (according to the Cappadocians) a method of theology too skilful and logical[127].

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124 Moreschini 2012, 111–113. For an analysis of this passage in the context of Gregory's oeuvre, see Meier 1989, 105–106. See also §5.1.2.1.

125 On Sextus, Diogenes says: Σέξτος ὁ ἐμπειρικός, οὗ καὶ τὰ δέκα τῶν Σκεπτικῶν καὶ ἄλλα κάλλιστα (Diog. L. 9, 12, 116), however it is doubtful that κάλλιστα refers to style; Pyrrho left nothing to judge hist style upon: Ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὸν ὅλον τῆς συναγωγῆς αὐτῶν τρόπον συνιδεῖν ἐκ τῶν ἀπολειφθεισῶν συντάξεων. αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ ὁ Πύρρων οὐδὲν ἀπέλιπεν (9, 11, 102); Chrysippus is remembered for his dialectical skills and his careless style: Οὕτω δ᾽ ἐπίδοξος ἐν τοῖς διαλεκτικοῖς ἐγένετο, ὥστε δοκεῖν τοὺς πλείους ὅτι εἰ παρὰ θεοῖς ἦν [ἡ] διαλεκτική, οὐκ ἂν ἄλλη ἦν ἢ ἡ Χρυσίππειος. πλεονάσας δὲ τοῖς πράγμασι τὴν λέξιν οὐ κατώρθωσε. (7, 7, 180). Aristotle is problematic, because of the difference in style between his exoteric works (see Cicero's *flumen orationis aureum fundens Aristoteles* in *ac.* 2, 38, 119) and his esoteric ones, considered obscure (πολὺ μὲν ἐν σοφοῖσι κούκ ἀνώνυμον τὸ Περὶ ἑρμενείας τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους βιβλίον τῆς τε πυκνότητος ἕνεκα τῶν ἐν αὐτῶι παραδιδομένων θεωρημάτων καὶ τῆς περὶ τὴν λέξιν δυσκολίας, Ammon. Philos. *in Aristot. int.* 3r). Gregory knew probably Aristotle from his esoteric writings on logic and rhetoric (Norris 1997, 26–39), hence not as a stylist but as an accurate dialectician. Gregory explicitly recognises the different grounds on which these philosophers are rejected in a passage parallel to this: τὰς Πύρρωνος ἐνστάσεις, ἢ ἐφέξεις, ἢ ἀντιθέσεις, καὶ τῶν Χρυσίππου συλλογισμῶν τὰς διαλύσεις, ἢ τῶν Ἀριστοτέλους τεχνῶν τὴν κακοτεχνίαν, ἢ τῆς Πλάτωνος εὐγλωττίας τὰ γοητεύματα (*or.* 32, 13, 25), where Pyrrho, Chrysippus and Aristotle are characterised by their dialectical devices, whereas Plato is endowed with a more irrational kind of persuasion (γοητεύματα), linked to his beautiful style.

126 It is likely that rhetoric and logic were not so sharply distinct in late antique school curricula as we may think: Norris 1997, 19–25. In another passage, criticizing the Arian George of Cappadocia but in reality aiming at contemporary neo-Arians such as Eunomius, Gregory links again criticism of rhetorical devices, in the form of a reprise of Dionysius of Halicarnassus' critique of Asianism, with criticism of dialectic, as he recalls the names of Pyrrho and Sextus: *or.* 21, 12–13; MacDougall 2017.

127 E.g.: Gregory's theological orations begin with the sentence Πρὸς τοὺς ἐν λόγῳ κομψοὺς ὁ λόγος (*or*. 27, 1, 1); οἷς καὶ τοῦτο μέρος τρυφῆς, ἡ περὶ ταῦτα ἐρεσχελία καὶ κομψεία τῶν ἀντιθέσεων. (3); τὸ ἀσθενὲς τοῦ λόγου τοῦ μυστηρίου φαίνεται· καὶ οὕτω κένωσις τοῦ σταυροῦ τὸ τοῦ λόγου κομψὸν ἀναδείκνυται, ὡς καὶ Παύλῳ δοκεῖ. (*or*. 29, 10, 21); οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πιθανή τε καὶ εὐπαράδεκτος ἡ ἀπάτη τοῖς ἀκούουσι γένοιτο, κατεγλωττισμένη καὶ περιηνθισμένη ταῖς τοιαύταις τοῦ λόγου κομψείαις (Greg.

In the lines devoted to Gregory's positive description of the style he prefers, there are three main points to note. First, the three images the poet employs (295–300): language should walk lowly (instead of ride high on a horse)[128], it should be like a simple meal, as opposed to refined dishes made by professional cooks, and it should be like a simple piece of clothing, letting natural beauty transpire without adding anything to it. The two latter images, cooking and fine clothing, allude to the foundational passage of the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy—namely, Socrates's critique of rhetoric and sophistry in *Gorgias* 465B[129].

This leads us to the second remarkable point, the concept, expressed at 299–300, of discourse as having an intrinsic and natural beauty, provided by its contents, and also having a form of artificial beauty, covering the natural one from the outside as a clothing covers the body: the same concept—already present in Plato's passage—is developed by Themistius in his comparison of philosophy and rhetoric, in which he aimed at conciliating the two[130]. In this case, Gregory is more like Plato, in that he discards rhetoric.

Furthermore, these points share, in Gregory's formulation, also a moral undertone, so that the three images are formulated as ascetic renunciations of worldly goods[131]. Although owning a horse and using it as transport was clearly much more expensive than walking,

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Nyss. *c. Eunom.* 1, 1, 19); ὁ δὲ τοὺς σοφιστὰς διαβάλλων καὶ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ καθοπλίζων τὸν λόγον καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων πλημμελημάτων κατηγορῶν οὐκ ἐρυθριᾷ ἐν τοῖς περὶ τῶν δογμάτων λόγοις διὰ σοφισμάτων ἀστεϊζόμενος καὶ μιμούμενος τοὺς ἐν τοῖς συμποσίοις διὰ κομψευμάτων τινῶν ἐφελκομένους τὸν γέλωτα (608); ταῖς γὰρ κομψείαις τῶν σοφισμάτων τὸ φθοροποιὸν δόγμα οἷόν τινι μέλιτι καταχρώσαντες (2, 1, 58). It is remarkable that, except for two Euripidean occurrences, the word is typical of Old Comedy (see Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 977, *s.v.* κομψός).

128 The verb πεζεύω is almost always employed in contrast with πλέω, not to horse-riding, and almost never figuratively for language: Gregory's use is innovative but warranted by the adjective πεζός, which refers to infantry as opposed to cavalry and is often used for language, whether prose as opposed to poetry or in general for an unpretentious language. For Gregory is particularly important the Callimachean αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ Μουσέων πεζὸν ἔπειμι νομόν, *Ait.* 4, 112, 9. A similar usage is found at Greg. Nyss. *c. Eunom.* 3, 7, 15: τί ταῦτα, Εὐνόμιε; καὶ σὺ πεζεύεις κατὰ τοὺς ἰδιώτας ἡμᾶς καὶ καταλιπὼν τὰς τεχνικὰς περιόδους ἐπὶ τὴν ἄλογον συγκατάθεσιν καὶ αὐτὸς καταφεύγεις ὁ πολλὰ τοῖς ἄνευ λογικῆς ἐντρεχείας ἐπιχειροῦσι τῷ γράφειν ἐπονειδίσας. Ἀγροικοστομέω is a Gregorian *hapax* (for ἀγροικία in Gregory see §4.1.2.1).

129 τῇ μὲν οὖν ἰατρικῇ, ὥσπερ λέγω, ἡ ὀψοποιικὴ κολακεία ὑπόκειται: τῇ δὲ γυμναστικῇ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον τοῦτον ἡ κομμωτική, κακοῦργός τε καὶ ἀπατηλὴ καὶ ἀγεννὴς καὶ ἀνελεύθερος, σχήμασιν καὶ χρώμασιν καὶ λειότητι καὶ ἐσθῆσιν ἀπατῶσα, ὥστε ποιεῖν ἀλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου τοῦ διὰ τῆς γυμναστικῆς ἀμελεῖν (Plat. *Gorg.* 465B).

130 ἀλλότριον κάλλος ἐφελκομένους τοῦ οἰκείου (Plat. *Gorg*. 465B); πλόκαμοί τε οὔτε ἄφετοι μεθίενται πλανᾶσθαι οὔτε ἐκ ποικιλίας κομμωτικῆς ἀναπλέκονται, ἀλλὰ μέσον τινὰ ἔχουσι κόσμον ἀταξίας τε καὶ τρυφῆς. φιλοσοφία γὰρ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν κάλλος ἄφραστον ἔχουσα πᾶν ὅ τι περ ἐπείσακτον ἀτιμάζει καὶ οὐ προσίεται. οὐκοῦν οὐδὲ ὑπογράφει τὰ ὄμματα οὐδὲ τεχνητὸν ἔρευθος αὐτῇ τὰς παρειὰς χρώννυσιν … Ῥητορικὴ δέ—πάντως γάρ που καὶ ταύτης τὴν εἰκόνα ποθεῖτε—γενναία μέν τις καὶ αὐτὴ καὶ παγκάλη, ἀτὰρ οὐ τῇ φύσει μόνον ἀρκεῖται, πολλάκις δὲ θέλει καὶ τοῖς ἔξωθεν καλλωπίζεσθαι. καὶ αὐτῆς πολὺς μὲν καὶ ποικίλος κόσμος τὸ σῶμα σκέπει (Themist. *or.* 24, 303b-304a). In the same tradition, Aelius Aristides' defence of rhetoric from Plato's *Gorgias*: Dittadi 2017.

131 The moral undertone may have been present already in Plato: Reames 2016.

there is scant reference to walking as an ascetic choice. Socrates and some Cynics are represented as walking barefoot[132], but the emphasis is on bare feet, not on the act of walking, while Cato the Younger and Jesus are often portrayed walking[133]. In Syriac, a whole poem, dedicated to the hermit Julian Saba (*Iul. Saba* 11), praises him for the humility he displayed by renouncing every means of transport other than feet. The expression λιτὴ τράπεζα (297) is found in the plural in the gnomic poem of Pseudo-Phocylides (λιταῖσι τραπέζαις, 82), which, considering Gregory's fondness for gnomic poetry, is his likely source. However, in Pseudo-Phocylides the context is hospitality, whereas here Gregory alludes to ascetic sobriety, a feature of philosophers ever since Aristophanes's *Clouds* (μήτ᾽ ἀριστᾶν ἐπιθυμεῖς, / οἴνου τ᾽ ἀπέχει καὶ γυμνασίων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀνοήτων, 416–417), which Gregory often expresses with the Cynic keyword μάζα accompanied by adjectives meaning "scarce", "small" (μικρά, στενή, ὀλίγη)[134]. Among the occurrences, II, 1, 12, 74 and II, 1, 41, 45–46 are notable, because in the first passage the expression refers to Gregory's model ascetic, whereas in the second passage it is applied to the Cynic Maximus (see below, §3.2.2.1). As regards clothing, Socrates proverbially used only one cloak for all seasons, the so-called τρίβων, which became part of the philosopher's traditional attire (§3.1.1.3).

Other clues to a moral interpretation of language come from the already mentioned reference to Plato's *Gorgias*: the counterparts of cookery and cosmetics being medicine and gymnastics, the ideal bishop is indirectly characterised as physician and athlete. The first is traditionally associated with pastoral guidance (see §2.2.4.7); the second with asceticism and the martyrs. Furthermore, the role of φύσις in determining what is authentically beautiful resembles analogous stances in the moral sphere on the part of Cynics and Stoics, in particular the concept of "life according to nature"[135]. Finally, the idea of language (or the lack thereof) as an ascetic instrument resonates with other passages of Gregory's poetry[136].

Gregory's stance in the quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric would seem straightforward: philosophy—in this case, orthodox Christian doctrine—is the main concern, trampling everything else, to the point that a polished form is not merely indifferent but bears negative connotations, as the linguistic correspondent of a life without authenticity and full of unnecessary pleasures and commodities. Here, I come to the second point of the analysis, problematisation: it is true that some formulations (the reference to the apostles, 265–266; true beauty in the contents and not in the form, 299–300; the refusal of the

132 Zanker 1995, 33, 130.

133 Καὶ διεπόνει τὸ σῶμα γυμνασίοις ἐνεργοῖς, ἐθιζόμενος ἀνέχεσθαι καὶ καύματα καὶ νιφετὸν ἀκαλύπτῳ κεφαλῇ, καὶ βαδίζειν ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς πᾶσαν ὥραν ἄτερ ὀχήματος. τῶν δὲ φίλων οἱ συνεκδημοῦντες ἵπποις ἐχρῶντο, καὶ πολλάκις ἐκάστῳ παρέβαλλεν ὁ Κάτων ἐν μέρει προσδιαλεγόμενος, περιπατῶν αὐτὸς ὀχουμένων … πολλάκις δ᾽ ἀνυπόδητος καὶ ἀχίτων εἰς τὸ δημόσιον προῄει (Plut. *vit. Cat. min.* 5, 6–7; 6, 3); ὁδοιπορῶν, καὶ πεζεύων διηνεκῶς (PsBasil. *const. asc.* 4, 6).

134 Dziech 1925, 105–106 with n. 199; Meier 1989, 83–84.

135 Adamson 2015, 14–15, 77.

136 See §1.3.2 and the theme of silence explained by Storin 2011.

philosophers, 302–308) seem to imply a complete rejection of polished forms, but many others are, rather, *excusing* the lack of polished forms for the sake of orthodox content (indifference to form, 272–273; "we don't look for anything more", 284–285; uneducated language as just a possibility, 295–298). Most of all, the passage at 276–283 implies through its images that a formally good exposition is better than a mediocre one (see §1.3.1):

> Πηγῆς τί κέρδος ἐστὶν ἐμπεφραγμένης;
> Τί δ' ἡλιακῆς ἀκτῖνος, ἣν κρύπτει νέφος;
> Τοιοῦτόν ἐστι νοῦς σοφὸς σιγώμενος,
> Οἷον ῥόδου τὸ κάλλος, εἰ κάλυξ σκέπει
> Οὐκ εὐπρεπής· τὸ τερπνὸν ἐκφαίνει δ', ὅταν (280)
> Αὔραις ῥαγεῖσα τὸν τόκον θεατρίσῃ.
> Εἰ δ' ἦν ἀεὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐσκεπασμένον,
> Οὐδ' ἄν τις ἦρος ἦν χάρις τοῦ τιμίου.
> (II, 1, 12, 276–283)

> Which profit from a sealed spring,
> from a ray of sun concealed by clouds?
> Such is a wise thought unspoken,
> like the beauty of a rose that an ugly cup
> covers; the beauty appears when, (280)
> burst open by the wind, the cup pushes its offspring onstage;
> but if the beauty were to remain always covered,
> there would be no delight in much-revered spring.

Furthermore, Gregory steadily changes the connotation of the terms he uses as stylistic descriptors. For example, the term εὐπρεπής travels from a negative connotation at 276, where it describes the affectation of Greek style, which in general was refused by the apostles, to a positive connotation in the image of the rosebud (279–280) and of the clothing (299). Conversely, κάλλος, "beauty", is positive in the analogy of the rosebud (279) and in that of clothing (299) but is then rejected when it refers to pagan philosophers (306). This ambiguity might be explained with two orders of considerations. On a more concrete level, Gregory has to steer a middle course between two models of bishop, which he could not hope to incarnate as successfully as his contenders to the throne of Constantinople—namely, Maximus and Nectarius: he could not sport the spectacular renunciations of the Cynic, nor could he present himself as the man of traditional *paideia*, of the niceties of elite society, as was the former *praetor urbanus*. He had to present a model that cut right through the middle. This model, on a more elevated level of reflection, could also stand as a response to Julian's attack on Christianity: here, Gregory would have wanted to present Christianity as the culmination of the tradition of *paideia*, but at the same time preserve its outsider status as an "alien wisdom", allowed to harshly criticise pagan culture. The difficulty of expressing this middle stance of Christian culture lies, among other aspects, in the circumstance that Gregory has no single keywords like the Greek παιδεία and the various marks of style to define such culture, so that the poet is compelled to employ traditional words and shift continually

between their traditional and their new Christian sense, negating and affirming them in different passages. Nowhere is this process clearer than when Gregory defends the apostles against the accusation of being ἀπαιδεύτοι (230) and describes his adversary with this epithet (262), but then, having rejected the philosophers, allows for teaching ἀπαιδεύτως (308). Gregory is trying to cut, inside the Greek language, the space to talk of a distinctively Christian culture[137]. Yet to understand the nature of such a culture, we have to examine the content of the teaching proposed by Gregory.

In the context of Christian discourse, the distinction between λέξις and νοῦς evoked by Gregory at the beginning of this passage (268) belongs to the realm of biblical exegesis and expresses the difference between the literal meaning of Scripture and its allegorical or typological interpretation. The fundamental line is the γνώμη: ἐν νῷ γὰρ γάρ ἐστιν ἡμῖν ἡ σωτερία (274), to which a parallel is found in the poem *On His Verses* (II, 1, 39, 51): εἰ καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἡμῖν ἐν θεωρίᾳ. If we add the term employed at II, 1, 12, 286, we have Gregory's lexicon as regards the form/content antithesis: form is expressed with λέξις, content as νοῦς, θεωρία or ἔμφασις[138]. Λέξις is normally used to signify a text, especially in its material form and contingent formulation as opposed to the meaning it expresses, and hence it is the term used by Alexandrine tradition to indicate the "letter" as opposed to the allegory, which in the same tradition is frequently called νοῦς[139]. On the contrary, the Antiochene tradition prefers to use the term θεωρία and to differentiate it sharply from Alexandrine allegory[140]. However, as explained by Lampe 1961, 649,

137 Gregory's project in these lines echoes many characters of similar educational projects, especially from church writers, examined by Stenger 2022: the priority given by Gregory to content over style, and his very description of literary style in terms of life style reflect the prevalent interest on the personality and life forming aspects of education rather than the technical ones in late antiquity; in view of this interest, educational projects were frequently presented in the form of biographies or autobiographies, such as is the case here with Gregory (Stenger 2022, 95–98, 185–187). Moreover, Gregory's critical relationship with the classics and his attempt to delineate a specifically Christian form of education echo the widespread conscience of late antique authors to be indeed "late" and removed from the classics, as well as the tendency to see education as defining group identities (Stenger 2022, 53–56, 282–284).

138 It is remarkable that one of Gregory's pupils, Jerome, expressed a similar distinction of *sensus* and *verba* in the context of his translation theory, focalizing on *sensus* to the detriment of *verba* (see his *ep*. 57), even though in his case Cicero's influence is also prominent.

139 Lampe 1961, 797, *s.v.* Λέξις; 927, *s.v.* νοῦς; εἰ μὴ ἔχοι νοῦν τινα κεκρυμμένον καὶ ἔτι ἡμῖν ἀσαφῆ ἡ προκειμένη λέξις (Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 5, 1, 1); Ὅσον γὰρ ἐπὶ τῇ λέξει δύο σημαίνεται ἐκ τοῦ «υἱέ μου, φύλαξαι τοῦ ποιῆσαι βιβλία πολλά»· ἓν μὲν ὅτι . . . ἕτερον δὲ ὅτι . . . (Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 5, 2, 1); διιόντων ἡμῶν ἐκ τῆς προχείρου λέξεως ἐπὶ τὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς θεωρούμενον νοῦν (Eus. *Against Marcellus* 1, 3, 15, but note the use of the verb θεωρεῖσθαι); οὐχ ἵσταται ἐπὶ τῆς λέξεως τὴν δὲ τῶν λεγομένων διάνοιαν πολυπραγμονεῖ (Eus. *Ecclesiastical theology* 2, 10, 2); τὸν νοῦν μόνον, οὐ τὴν λέξιν, παριστᾶν ἐπαγγέλλεται. (Clem. Alex. *strom.* 7, 1, 1); οὐ τὸ σημαινόμενον ἀπ' αὐτῶν σκοποῦντες, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ ψιλῇ ἀποχρώμενοι τῇ λέξει (Clem. Alex. *strom.* 7, 16, 96).

140 τὴν ἀγωγὴν καὶ τὴν θεωρίαν τὴν ὑψηλοτέραν οὐκ ἀποκωλύσομεν … ἐκεῖνο δὲ μόνον χρὴ φυλάττεσθαι μή ποτε ἀνατροπὴ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου ἡ θεωρία ὀφθῇ ὅπερ οὐκέτι ἂν εἴη θεωρία ἀλλὰ ἀλληγορία (Diodore of Tarsus *Proemium in Psalmos* 88); ἄλλο τὸ ἐκβιάσασθαι εἰς ἀλληγορίαν καὶ ἱστορίαν, ἄλλο δὲ καὶ τὴν ἱστορίαν φυλάξαι καὶ θεωρίαν ἐπινοῆσαι (Severian. Gabal. *mund. creat.* 4, 2).

s.v. θεωρία, the term is employed indifferently as a synonym of ἀλληγορία by Alexandrians and Cappadocians. The term ἔμφασις is consistently used by Gregory of Nyssa to indicate the "meaning" of divine names or the spiritual interpretation of Scripture, and with the same meaning it is employed here by Gregory of Nazianzus[141].

The usage of such terms suggests that Gregory is not just discussing doctrine in an abstract manner, nor does he intend primarily preaching, but above all writing and exegesis in particular: this is confirmed by one of the arguments proving the apostles' wisdom, earlier in II, 1, 12 (230–237)—namely, the fact that their writings are still studied to Gregory's day by the finest minds of his generation; that this is Gregory's intention is confirmed also by his remark later in this passage (284–294) on the utility of written works (γεγραμμένοι λόγοι, 288):

Οὐδὲν πλέον ζητοῦμεν ὡς οὕτω λαλεῖν
Ὡς οἱ δοκοῦσιν εὐτελεῖς τὰ τοῦ λόγου. (285)
Εἰ δ' οὖν, παρίστη τὰς ἐκείνων ἐμφάσεις.
Αὐγῆς ποθῶ τι καὶ μέρος τῆς σῆς λαβεῖν.
Εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐδέν εἰσιν οἱ γεγραμμένοι
Λόγοι, τοσοῦτον πῶς ἐπαιζόμην χρόνον
Ἢ πῶς θαλάσσης ψάμμον ἠρίθμουν μάτην (290)
Νύκτας συνάπτων ἡμέραις ἐν τοῖς πόνοις,
Ὡς ἄν τις ἔλθοι εἴς γε ῥυτίδας λόγος;
Εἰ δ' εἰσὶν ὥσπερ εἰσὶν, εὖ γεγραμμένοι,
Μὴ δῷς ἀράχναις τῶν δικαίων τοὺς πόνους.
(II, 1, 12, 284–294)

We don't look for anything more than speaking
like those who seem simple as regards speaking. (285)
At least, may their meanings be present.
I long to perceive if only a part of your splendour.
For if written doctrines are of no value,
why did I jest such a long time,
or rather: why did I count vainly the sands of the sea, (290)
in toils weaving nights with the days,
in order to have, if only with wrinkles, a bit of learning?
But if they are—as they are—well written,
then leave not to the cobwebs the labours of the just.

This passage gives us a glimpse of the kind of knowledge Gregory is defending—before he presents its contents: it must be something rooted in Scripture and taking advantage of previous works of exegesis ("the labours of the just", τῶν δικαίων τοὺς πόνους, 294). Incidentally, he presents himself as an experienced practitioner of such knowledge (289–292). The term πόνος recurring in these lines is a keyword of Christian asceticism, because it defines not only ascetic exercises but specifically a learned asceticism, in

141 Lampe 1961, 456, *s.v.* ἔμφασις.

which studying has a spiritual and moral function[142]. The final lines of the discussion (323–329) contain a *peroratio* calling Gregory's fictive listener, who must be conceived as a bishop, to teach something if he has anything to teach, and otherwise to remain silent:

> Πῶς ῥεῖ τὰ πάντα, φάσκε μοι, ποῦ δ' ἵσταται.
> Εἰ σοί τι τούτων ἐτρανώθη Πνεύματι –
> Τὸ σύμπαν εἴτε καὶ μέσως εἴτ' ἐνδεῶς,
> Ὅσον κεχώρηχ' ἡ κάθαρσις σῆς φρενός –, (325)
> Μή με στερήσῃς· εἰ δὲ πάντη τυφλὸς εἶ,
> Τί χειραγωγεῖς μὴ βλέπων; Ὢ τοῦ σκότους
> Τῶν μὴ βλέποντι χρωμένων διδασκάλῳ,
> Ὡς εἰς βόθρον πέσωσιν ἀγνοίας ἅμα!
> (II, 1, 12, 323–329)

> Tell me, prithee, how everything goes, and where it stands,
> if the Spirit has revealed some of these things to you,
> or every thing, whether only a little or even poorly,
> inasmuch as the purity of your mind was capable. (325)
> Rob me not of these! But if you are totally blind,
> then why do you blindly lead? Alas, the dimness
> of those who trust a blind guide,
> how shall they fall together in the pit of their ignorance!

Through this *peroratio*, Gregory gives away his conception of the role of the teacher and of the nature of knowledge in this new Christian culture[143]. Knowledge, he says, is bestowed by the Spirit (323); hence, it is divine in origin. The role of the teacher is to be the vessel of such knowledge and to transmit it. However, the movement is not only top-down, because different people may be more or less receptive to this knowledge, depending on their inner purification. The terms used by Gregory are particularly interesting: the capacity for reception is expressed by the verb χωρέω, "to contain",

142 Lampe 1961, 1121, *s.v.* πόνος; 1480, *s.v.* φιλόπονος.

143 Beginning with the expression ῥεῖ τὰ πάντα, one could construe this passage as alluding to Greek natural philosophy: apart from the reference to Heraclitus' flow-theory, Gregory asks the much-debated question of why and where the world stands still in space (ποῦ δ' ἵσταται), discussed by Anaximander and Anaximenes (Anaximander *frg*. 26 D.-K.; Anaximenes *frg*. 6–7 D.-K.) and ends the *peroratio* with the fall into a pit, which may remind of the anecdote of Thales falling into a well (ἄνω βλέποντα, πεσόντα εἰς φρέαρ, Plat. *Theaet.* 174A). Vaguer still, the expression στερήσῃς (326) may remind of Aristotle's principle of στέρησις (Aristot. *phys*. 189b 30–191a 22) and κάθαρσις the second poem by Empedocles (Diog. L. 8, 77). However, I do not think these links important for the text: the expression πῶς ῥεῖ τὰ πάντα may well derive from doxological literature on physics, but then ποῦ δ'ἵσταται can be explained simply as the contrary to the former expression, as a way to complete Gregory's questions. The other allusions are too vague to be relied upon, and the falling into a pit is best explained by Mt. 15:14 and Lc. 6:39, which are also verbally nearer to Gregory's text than, e.g., Plato's account of Thales, whose meaning, with the falling caused by the act of looking above, would contradict Gregory's very argument here.

while the central element of reception is κάθαρσις, "purity" or "purification"[144]. These two lexical elements are typical of Origen's theory of knowledge and revelation: for Origen, revelation is a dialogical process; it progresses in time and engages two people, Christ the Logos and the rational creature. The Logos reveals himself to the creature in the form most apt to the creature's progress, while the creature, purifying (κάθαρσις) itself through the different revelations, increases her capacity (χώρεω) for new knowledge. Therefore, Christ may appear different to different people, depending on their spiritual progress[145]. This theory of knowledge, adopted by Gregory, gives a theological foundation to his contention that the Christian teacher should be an ascetic, since it is through asceticism that one purifies oneself for knowledge.

Gregory's emphasis on Scripture and previous exegetical works, together with his allusion to Origen's theory of knowledge, clarifies the real-life model for Gregory's teacher: Origen. The Christian culture Gregory is proposing follows Origen's lead and has the same two pillars as Origen's: Scripture and asceticism. Gregory's Origenism is confirmed by the contents of such a teaching, laid out in lines 309–322:

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144 Ὅσον κεχώρηχ'ἡ κάθαρσις σῆς φρενός (325). φρήν, at the singular and in the sense of "mind", can be considered a poetic word. If we admit that φρήν is a poetic substitution for καρδία, there may be an allusion to the fifth beatitude (Mt. 5:8).

145 Οἱ γοῦν προφῆται καὶ διὰ τὸ καθαρῶς βεβιωκέναι τὸ θεῖον πνεῦμα χωρήσαντες (Orig. *c. Cels.* 7, 18); Λόγον γὰρ προϋπάρξαι τὸν καθαίροντα τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ δεῖ, ἵνα κατὰ τοῦτον καὶ τὴν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ κάθαρσιν, πάσης περιαιρεθείσης νεκρότητος καὶ ἀσθενείας, ἡ ἀκραιφνὴς ζωὴ ἐγγένηται παρὰ παντὶ τῷ τοῦ λόγου καθ' ὃ θεός ἐστιν αὐτὸν ποιήσαντι χωρητικόν (*in Joh. comm.* 2, 18, 129); Διὰ τοῦτο οἱ γινόμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐπὶ τῷ λούσασθαι, τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν ἀποτίθενται τῆς Αἰγύπτου, καὶ ἐπιτηδειότεροι πρὸς τὸ ἀναλαμβάνεσθαι γίνονται, καὶ ἀπὸ τῆς μιαρωτάτης λέπρας καθαρίζονται, καὶ διπλασιασμὸν χωροῦσιν χαρισμάτων, καὶ ἕτοιμοι πρὸς πνεύματος ἁγίου παραδοχὴν γίνονται, ἄλλῳ ποταμῷ οὐκ ἐφιπταμένης τῆς πνευματικῆς περιστερᾶς. (6, 48, 250); Πρὸ γὰρ τούτων τῶν οἰκονομιῶν ἅτε μηδέπω κεκαθαρμένοι οὐκ ἐχώρουν ἀγγέλων παρ' αὐτοῖς ἐπιδημίαν (57, 293); οὐκ ἂν χωρὶς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου χωρησάντων ἡμῶν τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ λόγου ὠφέλειαν, μένοντος ὁποῖος ἦν τὴν ἀρχὴν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα θεόν, καὶ μὴ ἀναλαβόντος ἄνθρωπον, τὸν πάντων πρῶτον καὶ πάντων τιμιώτερον καὶ πάντων μᾶλλον καθαρώτερον αὐτὸν χωρῆσαι δυνάμενον. (10, 6, 26); μόνος γὰρ καὶ πᾶς ὁ νιψάμενος τοὺς πόδας ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ὁδεύει τὴν ὁδὸν ταύτην τὴν ζῶσαν καὶ φέρουσαν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα, καὶ οὐ χωρεῖ ἡ ὁδὸς αὕτη πόδας μεμολυσμένους καὶ τοὺς ἔτι μὴ καθαρούς. (32, 7, 81); on the interpretation of Scripture: καὶ τάχα διὰ τοῦτο αἱ 'ἐπὶ καθαρισμῷ τῶν Ἰουδαίων ὑδρίαι κεῖσθαι' λεγόμεναι, ὡς ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίῳ ἀνέγνωμεν, 'χωροῦσιν ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς'· αἰνισσομένου τοῦ λόγου περὶ τῶν παρὰ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ 'ἐν κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίων', ὡς ἄρα οὗτοι καθαρίζονται διὰ τοῦ λόγου τῶν γραφῶν, ὅπου μὲν 'δύο μετρητάς', τὸν ἵν' οὕτως εἴπω ψυχικὸν καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸν λόγον, χωρούντων, ὅπου δὲ 'τρεῖς', ἐπεί τινες ἔχουσι πρὸς τοῖς προειρημένοις καὶ τὸ σωματικὸν οἰκοδομῆσαι δυνάμενον (*princ.* 4, 2, 5; it is the first excerpt in the *Philocalia Origenis* attributed to Gregory and Basil); γένοιτο δ' ἀνευρεθῆναι καρδίαν ἐπιτηδείαν καὶ διὰ τὴν καθαρότητα χωροῦσαν τὰ γράμματα τῆς σαφηνείας τῶν παραβολῶν (*in Mt. comm.* 14, 12); πρὸς τοῦτο δὲ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς ὁ σωτήρ, διδάσκων ἡμᾶς δῶρον εἶναι τὸ διδόμενον ἀπὸ θεοῦ τὴν παντελῆ καθάρευσιν, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἀσκήσει παραγινόμενον ἀλλὰ μετ' εὐχῶν πολλῶν ὑπὸ θεοῦ διδόμενον, τὸ οὐ πάντες χωροῦσι τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' οἷς δέδοται (25).

Δίδαξον ἡμᾶς, ὡς θέλεις, δίδασκε δέ·
Τίς ἡ Τριάς μοι, πῶς ἐνίζεται Θεός (310)
Καὶ τέμνετ' αὖθις, ἓν σέβας, φύσις μία,
Μονὰς Τριάς τε, ἀγγέλων δὲ τίς φύσις
Κόσμου τε δισσοῦ καὶ προνοίας ἐνδίκου
(Κἂν πολλὰ μὴ δίκαια τοῖς πλείστοις δοκῇ)·
Ψυχῆς τε σώματός τε τίς λόγος, νόμων (315)
Πρώτου τε δευτέρου τε· σάρκωσις δὲ τίς
Τοῦ καὶ νοητῶν πλεῖστον ἐξεστηκότος·
Καὶ τῶν ἀνίσων μίξις εἰς δόξαν μίαν,
Νέκρωσις εἰς ἔγερσιν, οὐρανὸν πάλιν,
Ἀνάστασις δὲ καὶ κρίσις τίνος λόγου, (320)
Ἢ τίς δικαίοις, τίς δ' ἁμαρτωλοῖς βίος.
(II, 1, 12, 309–321)

Teach us as you prefer, but teach,
who is Trinity for me, how God is One (310)
and still distinct, one worship, one nature,
monad and triad; which is the nature of angels,
the duplicity of the world, the justice of Providence
in spite of many injustices apparent to the majority
and which is the relationship between soul and body (315)
and the first and second laws and what is incarnation,
which exceeds by far any other object of knowledge,
and the mixture of two natures in one glory,
mortification resulting in awaking and heaven again,
and what is the sense of resurrection and judgement, (320)
which the life of the just, which of the wicked.

This list is a systematic presentation of the Christian faith, containing almost all of its basic tenets and then more: indeed, when the list is compared with the Nicene and Constantinopolitan Creeds, some differences stand out. First, the creeds do not treat separately Jesus's earthly life and God the Son as a part of the Trinity; they also link the resurrection and last judgement to Jesus's life (ἐρχόμενον κρῖναι ζῶντας καὶ νεκρούς). Second, in the Constantinopolitan Creed the relationship between Old and New Testaments is only alluded to in relation to Jesus's resurrection (ἀναστάντα τῇ τρίτῃ ἡμέρᾳ κατὰ τὰς γραφάς) and the role of the Spirit (τὸ λαλῆσαν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν). Third, the Constantinopolitan Creed has an ecclesiological clause (Εἰς μίαν, ἁγίαν, καθολικὴν καὶ ἀποστολικὴν Ἐκκλησίαν) and a sacramental one (ὁμολογοῦμεν ἓν βάπτισμα εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν), both items completely lacking from Gregory's list. Fourth, Gregory's list contains many items left unaddressed by the creeds, such as the angels, the nature of the world, theodicy and providence, and anthropology. Therefore, this list cannot be linked to the creeds.

Gregory offers a systematic presentation of the Christian tenets in another instance—namely, the *Poemata arcana* (I, 1, 1–5; 7–9). These present an account of the faith very similar to our list: the Persons of the Trinity are examined in their relationship (I, 1, 1–3); then follows the world (I, 1, 4) and providence (I, 1, 5), the rational creatures, mainly the angels (I, 1, 7), the soul—namely, a rational creature in a body, man (I, 1, 8)—and finally

the relationship between the two Testaments and Jesus's incarnation (I, 1, 9). The list is almost complete; only a comprehensive and autonomous treatment of the *novissima* is lacking. This means that, as usual, Gregory is implying that he is the best example of the kind of teaching he is proposing. However, it still leaves open the question of whether he was the first to organise Christian dogma in this way or if he has a source.

The answer is found, of course, in Origen. Although the prospect of faith presented at the beginning of the *De principiis* does not correspond with Gregory's list, the order of the subjects in the body of the treatise—at least in the form witnessed by Rufinus's translation—corresponds so perfectly that one could employ Gregory's lines as the index for Origen's work. In his *praefatio*, Origen distinguishes apostolic preaching from ecclesiastical tradition[146]. Apostolic preaching is composed of God the Father and Creator, the God of the Old and New Testaments; the Son, as Logos and Christ incarnated, dead, resurrected, ascended, and returning to judge; the Holy Spirit (*praef.* 4); and the soul, merits, demerits and their retribution in the afterlife, and the resurrection of the bodies (*praef.* 5). Ecclesiastical preaching entails free will (*praef.* 5); the devil and his angels (*praef.* 6); the end of the world (*praef.* 7); the divine inspiration of Scripture and its occult meaning (*praef.* 8); and the good angels (*praef.* 10). Interspersed in this exposition, Origen presents themes still undecided by the church, promising to discuss them.

Here is the correspondence between Gregory's list and the contents of the *De principiis*:

II, 1, 12, 309–321	**Origen, *De principiis***
God as Triunity (310–312)[147]	*De deo* (1, 1) *De Christo* (without incarnation) (1, 2) *De Spiritu Sancto* (1, 3–4)

146 On this distinction, Behr 2017, xxxix–xlvi.

147 Over against Gregory's keen interest in Trinitarian question, even in relation to the episcopate, it is worth noting the lack of references to them in Ephrem's poems. The only, disputed, reference is found at *CN* 13, 3: "Three priests, three treasurers, / who steadfast keep // the key of "trinity" [*tlītāyūtā*], / three gates opened up for us, // each one of them with his key / opened his gate in his time." The problem is that in the following stanza the bishops use the "key of trinity" to usher historical incidents related to Nisibis' position in the Persian-Roman war, which is difficult to link to "Trinity" in the dogmatic sense of the word. However, the term *tlītāyūtā* seems to be used mainly for the Trinity, and Ephrem too employs it in this sense in four cases (*hymn. fid.* 18, 4, 3; 73, 2, 1; 21, 2 and *comm. in Gen.* 2, 34). In another instance, *tlītāyūtā* indicates a period of three days during the Creation of the world (*comm. in Gen.* 1, 9), and such a meaning would fit perfectly *CN* 13, 3, where the three bishops define three periods of time (*zabn-eh* at line 6) in Nisibis' life. Finally, the word *tlītāyā*, literally "third", can be used to mean "third party", "mediator". Therefore, it is equally employed for the Holy Spirit (as third Person of the Trinity) and for Christ (as "mediator" for humanity), as well as for the bishop, mediator of his community. Hence, *tlītāyūtā*, as the abstract name derived from *tlītāyā*, may as well be translated "episcopate", "intermediation", and much more so since the stanza employs the image of the bishop as steward administering the master's treasury through the key. I fail to see a deciding factor among these three interpretations of the word, yet in any case one cannot argue for a keen interest in the theme of Trinity on the part of Ephrem in the poems on bishops.

(continued)

II, 1, 12, 309–321	**Origen, *De principiis***
The angels (312) The world, intelligible and material (313)	*De rationabilibus naturis* (1, 5–6) *De caelestibus* (= the stars) (1, 7) *De angelis* (1, 8)
Theodicy (313–314) Man as composite of soul and body (315)	*De mundo* (2, 1–3)
Relationship between Old and New Testament (315–316)	*Quia unus est deus legis et prophetarum et domini nostri Iesu Christi Pater* (2, 4–5)
Incarnation (316–318) Death, resurrection, ascension of Christ (319)	*De incarnatione Christi* (2, 6)
	De Spiritu Sancto (2, 7) *De anima* (2, 8)
Novissima: resurrection, last judgement, heaven and hell, the end (320–322)	*De mundo et motibus rationabilium creaturis* (2, 9) *De iudicio* (2, 10) *De repromissionibus* (2, 11) *De arbitrii libertate* (3, 1) *De contrariis potestatibus* (3, 2–3) *De humanis temptationibus* (3, 4) *Quod mundum tempore coeperit et finem speret* (3, 5) *De consummatione* (3, 6) *Quod Scripturae divinitus inspiratae sunt* (4, 1) *Quomodo oportet legere et intellegere Scripturas* (4, 2–3) Summary (4, 4)

Admittedly, there are some minor differences: Gregory's insistence on Trinitarian doctrine as opposed to Origen's separated treatment of the Three Persons reflects the evolution of this dogma in the fourth century; anthropology is treated repeatedly by Origen, partly under the heading of "rational beings" and "world" (*princ.* 1, 5–6 and 2, 1–3) and more in detail later, as a prelude to the *novissima* (*princ.* 2, 4–5); similarly, the Holy Spirit is reprised at *princ.* 2, 7; moreover, the third book preserves a long discussion of free will and moral progress, which, however, can be justified as a defence of God's judgement and so is correctly put among the *novissima* (3, 1–4); finally, *princ.* 4 contains a discussion of Scripture. Gregory avoids these repetitions, because in the context of his poem he is not interested in reproducing Origen's double cycle of "theology" and "economy", each divided into "apostolic preaching" and "ecclesiastical tradition". Furthermore, the discussion of Scripture is condensed in the idea of the relationship between Old and New Testaments.

These differences notwithstanding, it is certain that Gregory is alluding to Origen here, because the separation of the treatment of the Son (II, 1, 12, 310–312; *princ.* 1, 2) and of Christ incarnated (II, 1, 12, 316–318; *princ.* 2, 6) is unique to Origen. Moreover, one cannot understand why Gregory mentioned Providence or theodicy in the same breath with the corporeal constitution of man (313–315) if one does not take into account Ori-

gen's idea of the material life of the souls as divinely disposed; it is through this idea that the government of the world by divine Providence and the fact that human beings must live in a body are treated together in *princ.* 2, 1–3. Another analogy between the two is that Gregory, in introducing the incarnation, says σάρκωσις δὲ τίς / τοῦ καὶ νοητῶν πλεῖστον ἐξεστηκότος (316–317), highlighting its mysterious nature, which defies rational interpretation; similar formulations on the incarnation are found at *De principiis* 2, 6, 2:

> *Verum ex omnibus de eo miraculis et magnificis illud penitus admirationem humanae mentis excedit, nec invenit mortalis intelligentiae fragilitas, quomodo sentire vel intelligere possit. . . . Fortassis etiam totius creaturae caelestium virtutum eminentior est sacramenti istius explanatio.*

The similarities lie in the reference to "mind" and "intelligence" (νοητῶν, *mentis, intelligentiae*) and in the expressions of excellence construed with the preposition ἐκ (in Latin *ex*; see ἐξεστηκότος, *excedit*, *eminentior*; this last word being a comparative may point to something like Gregory's πλεῖστον). Finally, it is curious that, as Gregory alluded to Plato's *Gorgias* by way of the images of cookery and cosmetics, Origen begins the *praefatio* of the *De principiis* with a quote from Plato's *Gorgias*, the participles πεπιστευκότες καὶ πεπεισμένοι (Plat. *Gorg.* 454E and Eusebius's *Against Marcellus* 1, 4, 26): both theologians borrow from Socrates's criticism of rhetoric to introduce Christianity as the true philosophy (Rufinus's translation has the word *scientiam* in the same sentence, and Socrates in *Gorgias* is contrasting πίστις and ἐπιστήμη).

To sum up the results of this analysis, Gregory finds very problematic the spread of heresies of his times, which—in his opinion—demands that bishops should be teachers and should be educated for this task, something they currently are not. Gregory's ideal education corresponds to Origen's intellectual project: a wide scriptural science, bringing together all instruments of contemporary *paideia* (mainly linguistics and philosophy) to meditate on Scripture, at the same time leaving the door open for the inspiration coming from the Spirit—that is, uniting ascesis to education. Between Origen and Gregory there are two main differences: first and foremost, Gregory is engaged in a farther-reaching dialogue with pagan *paideia*, because he does not limit himself to engaging philosophy, but also consults literature (that is, rhetoric); hence—and here is the second point—Gregory is more ambiguous in his stance towards classical tradition, as if he was more of an insider of that tradition than Origen—who could, after all, pose as an "alien wise". This was no longer a possibility for Gregory, after Julian's attack against the "uneducated Nazarenes".

3.1.4 Spiritual father II: Moral leadership

Gregory's interest in doctrine notwithstanding, our poems emphasise much more the disciplinary role the bishops are supposed to undertake. This task has different facets: on a very general level, the bishop should make sure that his community is morally upright; on a more detailed level, the bishop oversaw the administration of penance

and communion, thereby regulating the admission to the community[148]. These functions made it desirable for the bishop to possess certain qualities and demanded that he perform certain acts: traditionally, the bishop was asked to be virtuous, in order to teach not only with words but most of all by example, and to be meek, since his administration of penance must not result in people leaving the church for his exceeding strictness[149].

3.1.4.1 The epos of the church (II, 1, 13, 27–74)

Gregory connects these traditional themes, once again, with his historical diagnosis of the state of the church. If in regard to doctrine the extraordinary spread of heresies inside the church called for more theological education of bishops, then similarly, as regards morality the church is plagued—this is Gregory's take—by wicked bishops in an unprecedented proportion; the main reason for this problem is the defective process for selecting bishops. This insight, often repeated, is placed inside a grandiose and sweeping view of history, aptly presented in the epic poem II, 1, 13. I will examine the narrative part of this poem (27–74), beginning with Gregory's expression of anguish at the current state of the church (27–42), then discussing his take on sacred history, meant to causally explain this state (43–58), and finally explaining his interpretation of what is happening, expressed through biblical typology (59–74).

It all begins when Gregory notes the chaos of ecclesiastical struggles, which stridently contrasts with the church's vocation and its beginnings:

> Σῶμα μέγα Χριστοῖο, τὸ τίμιον εὖχος ἄνακτος,
> Λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλήϊος, ἔθνος ἄπιστον,
> **Ἦν ὅτ' ἔην**. **Νῦν αὖτε** Θεοῦ κτέαρ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα
> Σείεται, οἷά τε κῦμα πολυσμαράγοιο θαλάσσης,
> Ἠὲ φυτὸν ζαμενέσσι τινασσόμενον ἀνέμοισι.
> Λαὸς ὅδ', ᾧ Θεὸς ἦλθεν ἀπ' οὐρανίοιο θοώκου,
> Κῦδος ἐὸν θνητοῖσιν ἐνὶ σπλάγχνοισι κενώσας,
> Καὶ μίχθη μερόπεσσι, Θεὸς βροτὸς εἰς ἓν ἀγερθείς,
> Καὶ μέγαν ὦνον ἔδωκε παθὼν δέμας, αἷμά τε θεῖον
> Ῥύσιον ἡμετέρης κακίης χέεν, ἄλλα τε πολλὰ
> Θύματα, τοὺς μετέπειτα λόγον σπείραντας ἅπασι.
> Καὶ γλυκεροῦ θανάτοιο πικρῆς χερὸς ἀντιάσαντας,
> Ὡς κε λόγῳ τίσωσι Λόγον Θεὸν, αἵματι δ' αἷμα.
> Τίς δονέει τόδε σῶμα; πόθεν τόσον ἄχθος ἔμοιγε;
> Πῶς δέ τε σῦς μονόφορβος ἐμὴν δηλήσαθ' ἀλωήν;
> Πῶς μήνη σκοτέεσσα τόσον κλέος ἀμφεκάλυψε;
> (II, 1, 13, 27–42)

148 Rapp 2000, 381; Rapp 2005, 24.

149 Rapp 2000. 380, 382; Rapp 2005, 25–26, 30–31, 55, 96; Rapp 2009, 76–77, 80.

Christ's great body, the Lord's pride and glory,
a kingly people from the whole earth, a nation beyond belief
was **once**; **now instead** God's property is shaken
to and fro, like a swell in the roaring sea,
or a plant quaking through raging winds.
This people, for whom God came from his heavenly throne
and emptied his glory in the bowels of a mortal
and mixed with mankind, God and mortal in one conjoined,
and, suffering, gave his body as a great price, his divine blood
poured as restitution of our sin, and many other
victims, those who later sowed everywhere the gospel
and from a bitter hand accepted a sweet death,
thereby paying God the Word with word, his blood with blood.
Who is disturbing this body? Whence such a burden for me?
How come a lone-grazing boar spoils my vineyard?
How come a shadowy night conceals such splendour?

These first lines of this first part introduce the theme: lines 27–29 address the church in an almost hymnic way through a series of periphrases, culminating in the verb in 29, "was once" (ἦν ὅτ'ἔην). Such a construction, with its biblical allusions, highlights the contrast between what the church *should* be and was and what she has become[150]. The previous state is characterised by unity (the "body"), quantity (μέγα, ὅλης γαίης, ἔθνος ἄπιστον), and glory (τίμιον εὖχος, βασιλήϊος): these attributes, normally employed for political power, are here used to delineate a religious triumph. The nexus of "was once" and "Now instead" (ἦν ὅτ'ἔην. Νῦν αὖτε) makes clear the downfall from a previous, utopic state[151].

The main problem decried by Gregory is chaos, an effect of contemporary struggles: the situation is vividly painted by the images of the wave and of the plant shaken by the wind in 30–31 and again decried with four tragic questions, each provided with its own metaphor (40–42). The double simile of 30–31 has a clear model in Homer's description of the Achaean assembly (ἀγορή) in turmoil, a theme particularly apt for describing the assembly of the church[152]. Lines 40–42 contain four questions, the former two of which

150 The series of epithets (σῶμα μέγα Χριστοῖο, τίμιον εὖχος ἄνακτος, λαὸς ὅλης γαίης βασιλήϊος, ἔθνος ἄπιστον) alludes to NT passages such as 1Petr. 2:9 (γένος ἐκλεκτὸν, βασίλειον θεράπευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς εἰς περιποίησιν) while at the same time employing classical phraseology: λαὸς . . . βασιλήϊος is similar to βασιλήϊον γένος, employed of Telemachus at Hom. *Od.* 16, 401; the expression ἔθνος ἄπιστον in the sense of "unbelievable" for its number (and not "unreliable") is found at Appian. *b. civ.* 1, 1, 10 but similar expressions—πλῆθος ἄπιστον is particularly meaningful in this respect—are found all over historiography (πλῆθος ἄπιστον—for example, at Thuc. 3, 113, 6; Diod. Sic. 1, 41, 7; 2, 16, 14; 3, 15, 4; 5, 10, 2; 26, 2 and *passim*).
151 The nexus seems to be a favourite of Gregory: see also II, 2, 7, 232. It is his invention, since the clause ἦν ὅτε ἦν (or ἔην) is never found in poetry outside Gregory's hexameters (see also *Anth. Gr.* 8, 143, 4; 178, 1; the only exceptions are a Christian poem on papyrus (see Cougny 1890, 339 [3, 390]) and a riddle (Cougny 1890, 569 [7, 27, 22]), but both may be inspired by Gregory. However, the nexus imitates Homeric expressions: ὥς ποτ' ἔον· νῦν αὖτε (Hom. *Il.* 23, 643); ἦα πάρος, νῦν αὖτε (Hom. *Od.* 19, 549).
152 Cf. Θεοῦ κτέαρ ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα / Σείεται, οἷά τε κῦμα πολυσμαράγοιο θαλάσσης, / Ἠὲ φυτὸν ζαμενέσσι τινασσόμενον ἀνέμοισι. (II, 1, 13, 29–31) with κινήθη δ' ἀγορὴ φὴ κύματα μακρὰ θαλάσσης / πόντου

inquire about the culprit responsible for the church's ruin (τίς; πόθεν), while the latter seem to ask how this state of affairs has come to be (πῶς, twice). Nor are these authentic questions, since Gregory already knows the information he is asking for; rather, they serve—as he often does in his writings—to define the theme upon which he will speak next. However—and herein lies the resemblance with tragic speech—they also convey his emotional stance towards the matter at hand: in this case, one of indignation and rage. Therefore, they belong, in Mastronarde's classification of tragic questions, to the category of "apistetic" and "epipleptic" questions[153]. Between 30–31 and 40–42, Gregory recalls the reason why Christians—the people he is talking of—were in such a blessed state to begin with: recalling Christ's work on earth and the church of the martyrs serves to sharpen the contrast with the current situation. The choice of chaos and agitation as the main problem, instead of heresy or immorality, betrays something of Gregory's situation and aims, because he had to renounce his post in Constantinople precisely because of a struggle between bishops, a struggle in which, formally, no charges of heresy or immorality were brought[154]. Hence, Gregory is going to blame the bishops for their discord: to the same strategy belongs the insistence on the church as "body" (σῶμα, 27 and 40), because it makes internal strife even more hideous; the same tactic is employed by Ephrem in relation to Valgash (see §2.1.2.2).

The following section (43–58), in which Gregory answers his tragic questions, has already been examined (§2.1.2.1): the poet argues that the devil is the real culprit of this situation, inserting it in the history of salvation. He echoes his own epic treatment of Adam's ban from paradise by hand of the devil in order to demonstrate the hostility Satan has always nurtured against the human race. In this way, the current situation is framed inside an ancient and always valid notion. The element of novelty is given by the fact that, after the conversion of the whole world, Satan resolved to turn to cunning instead of violence (which he had used against the martyrs) and to hit the

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Ἰκαρίοιο, τὰ μέν τ' Εὖρός τε Νότος τε / ὦρορ' ἐπαΐξας πατρὸς Διὸς ἐκ νεφελάων. / ὡς δ' ὅτε κινήσῃ Ζέφυρος βαθὺ λήϊον ἐλθὼν / λάβρος ἐπαιγίζων, ἐπί τ' ἠμύει ἀσταχύεσσιν, / ὣς τῶν πᾶσ' ἀγορὴ κινήθη (Hom. *Il.* 2, 144–149). There are many analogies between these two passages: the subject of the simile is a collective of people in turmoil, the two similes describe the same phenomena, namely waves in the sea and the wind moving plants, and there are even some detail in common, such as the metrical position of the word θαλάσσης, the idea of oscillating movement in the waves (ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα; τὰ μέν τ' Εὖρός τε Νότος τε), the attribute of the wind expressing its power (ζαμενέσσι; λάβρος). Obviously, both similes have many parallels in Homer's and Gregory's oeuvres (see Frangeskou 1985). The nexus ζαμενέσσι τινασσόμενον ἀνέμοισι is similar to Hom. *Od.* 5, 368: ὡς δ' ἄνεμος ζαὴς ᾖων θημῶνα τινάξῃ (but see also Sapph. *frg.* 47 V.). The expression πολυσμαράγοιο θαλάσσης comes from Oppian. *cyneg.* 2, 138.

153 For the classification of tragic questions, see Mastronarde 1979, 7–18. The verb δονέω reminds Sappho's *frg.* 130 V. (as in *frg.* 47 V., with the verb τινάσσω, here the subject is Ἔρως and the object the poet). The image of the σῦς μονόφορβος has already been analysed (§2.2.2). As regards the image of the new moon, the best parallel is Oppian. *halieut.* 4, 65–67.

154 Later on in the poem he writes: πρόφασις Τριάς ἐστι, τὸ δ' ἀτρεκὲς, ἔχθος ἄπιστον (II, 1, 13, 161), making clear that doctrine is not at issue. For more: §5.2.5.

leaders instead of the people at large: here Gregory inserted general considerations on the decisive role leaders play in any collective of people (§2.1.2.1).

From the point of view of style, it is notable that the history of salvation is here presented as a military campaign, with the devil as a military enemy devising plans to conquer the opponent's army: this gives an epic allure to the passage. The Son's divine glory and the church itself had already become, respectively, κῦδος (33, a metaphrase for δόξα) and κλέος (42), two keywords of Homeric warrior ethics. Moreover, the church is compared to an army (51–53), whereas in the parallel passage at II, 1, 12, 642–646 she is compared to a people (δῆμος) or a city (πόλις):

II, 1, 12, 642–646	**II, 1, 13, 43; 51–53**
Τοιαῦτ' ἐν ἡμῖν ἰσχύειν τὸν βάσκανον. Οὕτω σοφίζετ' εὐστόχοις πονηρίαις, Ὅταν δῆμόν τιν' ἢ πόλιν πλῆξαι θέλῃ. (645) Πρὸς οἷς ἑκάστου πειρᾶται, καὶ σύντομον Νόμον δίδωσι πονηρίας τὸν προστάτην	Λυσσήεις, κακοεργὸς, ἐπεὶ, μερόπεσσι μεγαίρων . . . Δεύτερον εὕρατο μῆχος ἐπίκλοπον. Ὡς στρατὸν ἔγνω Καρτερὸν, ἡγητῆρσιν ὁλοΐϊον ἔμβαλεν ἔχθος. Καὶ γὰρ, ἀγοῦ πίπτοντος, ὅλος στρατὸς ἐς χθόνα νεύει.
Such is the power of the Slanderer among us! Such subtle, shrewd tricks he plays whenever he wants to strike a city or a nation: (645) besides the individual temptations, he also gives the leader as a summary law of wickedness.	Rabid, malevolent, grudging mankind . . . He found another wily means. Recognizing the power of the army, he threw a deadly enmity between its leaders. Thus, once the chief is fallen, the whole army declines.

The iambic poem treats the problem by employing the civic imagery of comedy, tragedy, and rhetoric, whereas the hexametric poem presents to us the epic vision of a military collective. Comparison of the passages brings out these different connotations. Βάσκανος (II, 1, 12, 642) is a term of abuse frequently used by Demosthenes and found also in Aristophanes[155], but the epic poem has μεγαίρων (II, 1, 13, 43), a Homeric word, with the same meaning of "envying/envious" (going as far as "bewitching"). Moreover, the epic version expands on the attributes, adding λυσσήεις and κακοεργὸς. Similarly, σοφίζετ' εὐστόχοις πονηρίαις (643) is a prosaic version of εὕρατο μῆχος ἐπίκλοπον (II, 1, 13, 51), the idea of cunning being conveyed in the two passages by σοφίζομαι and by ἐπίκλοπος, which, like πονηρία, also expresses the idea of knavery, while μῆχος and εὔστοχος give the idea of accuracy. Interestingly, the devil's resource is slightly different in the two cases: against the church conceived as a city, the devil gives a "law of knavery" (νόμον . . . πονηρίας, II, 1, 12, 646), while against the church as army he gives a "deadly enmity" (ὁλοΐϊον ἔχθος, II, 1, 13, 52), an expression with powerful Homeric

155 Demosth. *or.* 18, 132, 142, 317; 21, 209; Aristoph. *equ.* 103.

resonances[156]. From a structural point of view, the fact that the devil's plotting is presented in the context of Gregory's historical analysis contributes to the narrative sense of a conflict, and therefore to epic associations, whereas in the iambic poem the same considerations are developed en passant, among other arguments against letting neophytes into the episcopate.

As regards the contents, Gregory's analysis of the moral situation aligns with his account of the doctrinal situation, in that both view the church falling from a previous state of grace—represented by apostolic simplicity and by the martyrs' victory—into a present state of trouble—represented by doctrinal struggles and strife between the bishops. The parallel between this pattern and the fall of Adam, explicitly drawn by the poet, suggests something of a cyclical movement: the pride before the fall, then God's grace and rescue, then again pride and a renewed fall.

In the last part of Gregory's narration (59–74), biblical typology serves to express this pattern. It is worthwhile to compare the passage with a passage of II, 1, 12 of similar function and content:

II, 1, 13, 59–74	**II, 1, 12, 355–367**
Πρόσθε μὲν ἀνδροφόνοισι φυγῆς πτολίεθρα τέτακτο,	(355) Ἤδη σχεδόν τι τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης
(60) Καὶ χῶρός τις ἔην ἀποπομπαίοις θυέεσσι,	Οἵαν λαβόντες ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν,
Καί τις καὶ πικρίης καὶ αἵματος ὑστατίοισιν	Ὡς σφόδρα χρώμεθ' ἀναξίοις τοῖς προστάταις.
Ἤμασιν, οἳ Χριστοῖο κακόφρονες ἐξεκένωσαν	Βοήσομ' οὐ ψευδῆ μέν, οὐχ ἥδιστα δέ.
Μισθὸν ἀτιμήτοιο κακὸν καὶ τυτθὸν ἔχοντες,	Σκηνή τις, οἶμαι, παίζετ' εὐπρεπεστέρα·
Οὔ τι μὲν ἐξ ἀέκοντος, ἐπεὶ Θεός ἐστιν ἄληπτος	(360) Νῦν τὰ προσωπεῖα, τὰ πρόσωπα δ'
(65) Χείρεσιν, εὖτ' ἐθέλῃσιν· ἀτάρ γε μὲν ἐξεκένωσαν.	ὕστερον.
Νῦν δ' ἕνα χῶρον ἴσασιν ἀτασθαλίης τε μόρου τε	Αἰσχύνομ'εἰπεῖν, ὡς ἔχει, φράσω δ' ὅμως.
Πάντες, ὅσοι ξεῖνοί τε καὶ ἔρκεος ἠμετέροιο,	Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι
Τὸ σεπτὸν τοπάροιθε σοφῶν ἕδος, ἔρκος ἀρίστων,	Κακῶν ἁπάντων ἐσμὲν ἐργαστήριον,
Βῆμα τόδ' ἀγγελικῆσι χοροστασίῃσι τεθηλὸς,	Σιγῇ βοῶντες, κἂν δοκῶμεν μὴ λέγειν·
(70) Κιγκλίδα τὴν μεσάτην κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος,	(365) Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονείτω μηδὲ εἷς·
Τοῦ τε παριπταμένοιο, θεῶν ὅρον, ἠμερίων τε.	Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον
Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε γελοίϊον, ἡνίκα πᾶσιν	Καὶ λῷον. ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἴσταται νόμος.
Ἐντὸς ἀκληΐστοιο θύρης δρόμος, ὡς δοκέω μοι	
Κήρυκος βοόωντος ἐνὶ μεσάτοισιν ἀκούειν·	

156 Beginning with Hom. *Il.* 1, 1, the μῆνιν . . . οὐλομένην dividing Achilles and Agamemnon and bringing ruin to the Achaeans, but also the discord between Menelaus and Agamemnon caused by Athena and described by Nestor at *Od.* 3, 135–136: μήνιος ἐξ ὀλοῆς γλαυκώπιδος ὀβριμοπάτρης. / ἥ τ' ἔριν Ἀτρεΐδῃσι μετ' ἀμφοτέροισιν ἔθηκε. See §5.2.5.

(continued)

II, 1, 13, 59–74	II, 1, 12, 355–367
In the past a city was assigned as exile for the murderers, (60) and a place to send the scapegoat to, and also one of bitterness and blood in the last days, whither those who despised Christ gushed out, having the scarce and petty price of the Priceless, and not from One unwilling, since God is intangible (65) to the hands, if he wants; and nevertheless they gushed out. But now one is the place known for wickedness and doom by everyone, the strangers as well as our fellow believers, the former august seat of the wise, hedge of the best, this stage thriving with angelic choirs, (70) the midmost gate between two worlds, the perennial and the one flying away, boundary of gods and mortals. Such was once; now instead 'tis ludicrous, as everyone is given way inside through an open door, so that I seem to hear a herald shouting in the town square:	(355) What a salvation we have received from God, one that spread already almost to the whole world, and nevertheless what utterly worthless leaders we have! I won't speak falsely, yea, but neither pleasantly. Alas, what a specious scene is played: (360) Personages now, and the persons later. It is shameful to say how things are, and still I'm going to say it. Appointed to be teachers of virtue, we are the workshop of every vice, silently screaming even when appearing not to talk: (365) "Wickedness presides: let no one labour, be wicked instead, 'tis the shortest and best way: action lays down the law."

In II, 1, 13, the poet repeats the scheme of a "before" and an "after", but in a more complex fashion. The idea of a previous state of grace and a present state of decadence is still present in the second part of the passage (66–74), where Gregory in a triadic movement describes the change: first, he introduces the theme of the current (Νῦν δὲ, 66) infamy of the church (66–67); then, he gives a contrasting subject to his predication, describing what the church was (τοπάροιθε, 68) and should be (68–71); finally, he turns to the contemporary, fallen state of the institution with his trademark nexus Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε (see note 151).

The same scheme, though in a less complex rendition, is employed in II, 1, 12, 362–364. First, note that the remark is inserted in the same historical schema as in II, 1, 13, because Gregory recalls at the beginning (355–356) the history of salvation: compare σχεδόν τι τῆς ὅλης οἰκουμένης / Οἵαν λαβόντες ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν in II, 1, 12, 355–356 with σπινθὴρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς ἀερθεὶς, / Πᾶσαν ἐπέδραμε γαῖαν ἀοίδιμος in II, 1, 13, 48–49, both referring to the spread of the Christian faith causing persecutions to stop[157].

157 Note the epic rewriting: generic ἐκ Θεοῦ σωτηρίαν (II, 1, 12, 356) is expressed with the metaphor of fire (σπινθὴρ δὲ λόγου, καὶ πυρσὸς, II, 1, 13, 48; σπινθήρ only once in Homer, in a simile, *Il.* 4, 77) and the attribute ἀοίδιμος, a favourite of Pindar (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 172, *s.v.* ἀοίδιμος); the verb ἐπιτρέχω (II, 1, 13, 49) to mean "spread over" of a fluid substance such as smell, light or fog is eminently epic (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 668, *s.v.* ἐπιτρέχω, II.2); instead of the prosaic οἰκουμένη (II, 1, 12, 355), the poetic γαῖα (II, 1, 13, 49; Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 335, *s.v.* γαῖα).

Second, the initial state of the church is expressed in similar terms when Gregory stresses the wisdom of its prelates and, consequently, their teaching function (σοφῶν ἔδος, II, 1, 13, 68 and τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι, II, 1, 12, 362). Moreover, in both texts the description of the current state of the church employs the same spatial metaphor, with the prosaic and unsavoury-sounding ἐργαστήριον κακῶν ἁπάντων at II, 1, 12, 363 and the epic-sounding χῶρον . . . ἀτασθαλίης τε μόρου τε at II, 1, 13, 66[158]. Finally, both passages serve as a bridge towards an invective against the bishops, and both employ a *prosopopoiia* as a framing device: The motif of the public announcement, given by a κῆρυξ in II, 1, 13 and betrayed by the bishops' behaviour at II, 1, 12, is strikingly similar. The image is powerful because it personifies the message that the bishop's behaviour sends, compelling the reader/hearer to confront that message as a very concrete voice; it is an effective and creative use of this scholastic exercise (see §3.3.2).

The main difference between these two passages is that at II, 1, 12 Gregory is concerned only with bad bishops. His description of the ideal state of the church through the expression Ταχθέντες εἶναι τοῦ καλοῦ διδάσκαλοι (362) focuses on the task the bishops have been assigned and how *they* are falling short of it. On the contrary, Gregory's concern in II, 1, 13 is the church at large, and it is only because the bishops are the aim of Satan's new strategy that they acquire such an importance. Gregory highlights this causal link between church and bishops through his reprise of the Ἦν ὅτε ἦν. Νῦν αὖτε nexus, which served to describe the decadence of the community in line 29 and now describes the decadence of priesthood in line 72. That the poet is referring to priesthood in these lines is demonstrated by his description of its ideal state, which corresponds to Gregory's idea that the priest should mediate between people and God (§2.1.3.1; §3.1.2; §3.2.2.3). The expressions ἕρκος (67–68), βῆμα (69), and κιγκλίς (70) suggest Gregory is not speaking of the church at large, but rather of the chancel (in Greek βῆμα) delimited by altar rails (κιγκλίς) and thus, by metonymy, of the priests, who alone were permitted to step into the chancel. This idea of seclusion for the priests is highlighted by the expression τὸ σεπτὸν σοφῶν ἔδος (68). The fact that the chancel is described as "thriving with angelic choirs" (ἀγγελικῇσι χοροστασίῃσι τεθηλὸς, 69) suggests a liturgical action, because of the idea that the liturgy on earth corresponded with and participated in the eternal liturgy in heaven, so that the angels were believed to be present at the liturgy with the celebrating priest[159]. Finally, the idea of mediation is explicitly referred to: the altar rail is defined as μεσάτην κόσμων δύο, τοῦδε μένοντος, / Τοῦ τε παριπταμένοιο, θεῶν ὅρον, ἠμερίων τε (70–71). This no doubt refers to its dividing the people from the priests and angels, with the priests joining the angels in the

158 On the Homeric allusion behind the term ἀτασθαλίη, see §5.2.3.

159 Cf. the last clause of the preface of the Antiochian liturgy in the *Const. apost.* 8, 12, 27: σὲ προσκυνοῦσιν ἀνάριθμοι στρατιαὶ ἀγγέλων, ἀρχαγγέλων, κυριοτήτων, θρόνων, ἀρχῶν, ἐξουσιῶν, δυνάμεων, στρατιῶν αἰωνίων· τὰ Χερουβὶμ καὶ τὰ ἑξαπτέρυγα Σεραφὶμ … λέγοντα ἅμα χιλίαις χιλιάσιν ἀρχαγγέλων καὶ μυρίαις μυριάσιν ἀγγέλων ἀκαταπαύστως καὶ ἀσιγήτως βοώσαις, καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἅμα εἰπάτω· Ἅγιος, ἅγιος, ἅγιος Κύριος Σαβαώθ κτλ.

ranks of the θεοί, a reference to Ps. 81, which makes their downfall seem more deplorable. However, if the κιγκλίς is to be taken as metonymically referring to the priesthood, its role of μεσάτη should have far more weight, suggesting that the priest is "midmost between two worlds, the perennial / and the one flying away, boundary of gods and mortals". After all, the word μεσάτος also means "mediator", "arbiter".

Gregory inserts the scheme of decadence in a wider historical context in II, 1, 13 than in II, 1, 12, by invoking analogous situations from a past even more remote than the previous state of grace—namely, the asylum cities of Old Testament laws, the specific place to which the scapegoat was released, and the Akeldama from the New Testament[160]. Such past examples show the contemporary church in the worst possible light. Even though formally these images are introduced as rhetorical *exempla*, the fact that they all come from the Bible and that the first two come from the Old Testament while the last comes from the New suggests a typological relationship between all these places: the Potter's Field and Judas's death are prefigured in the asylum cities and in the scapegoat, and they then prefigure the decadence of the church and the betrayal of the episcopate. Thus, one can understand whence came the seemingly cyclical view of history presupposed by Gregory's diagnosis of the contemporary episcopate: it is the practice of typological interpretation of the Bible that produces cyclical accounts of historical events, most of all when biblical stories are employed to clarify contemporary events with the deep conviction that contemporary history is in continuity with biblical stories[161].

As regards the matter at hand—the moral state of the episcopacy in Gregory's time—this scheme serves to corroborate the idea that, after the persecutions ceased and the great majority of the empire was converted, moral (and doctrinal) problems arose that were never seen before. Obviously, there is much to this picture that the modern historian may find fault with, but I shall only highlight one detail: Gregory of course describes a change from a previous to a new state, and he does so by explaining how the devil

160 For the cities of refuge, see: Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:11–12; Dtn. 4:41–42; 19:2–10; Jos. 20:1–3. For the scapegoat: Lev. 16:10; 21–22. For the Akeldama, Gregory draws clearly from Act. 1:18–19: οὗτος μὲν οὖν ἐκτήσατο χωρίον ἐκ μισθοῦ τῆς ἀδικίας καὶ πρηνὴς γενόμενος ἐλάκησεν μέσος καὶ ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ· καὶ γνωστὸν ἐγένετο πᾶσιν τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν Ἰερουσαλήμ, ὥστε κληθῆναι τὸ χωρίον ἐκεῖνο τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ αὐτῶν Ἀκελδαμάχ, τοῦτ' ἔστιν χωρίον αἵματος. Χωρίον is rendered by Gregory as χῶρος at line 60; αἵματος is preserved at 61, as well as μισθοῦ τῆς ἀδικίας as μισθὸν κακόν at 63; the gory detail of Judas' death—ἐξεχύθη πάντα τὰ σπλάγχνα αὐτοῦ—seems to me to be rendered by Gregory in the verb ἐξεκένωσαν, repeated twice at 62 and 66.

161 One can see an extreme example of this kind of thinking in Gregory's model of biblical exegesis and philosophy, Origen: the ubiquity of typological interpretation leads Origen to postulate an almost endless cycle of progressing worlds, each one re-enacting the basic scheme of Eden-Fall-Redemption on a higher ontological level than the previous one (on Origen's concept of progress, see Lettieri 2000). Some scholars argue that a similar scheme was already embedded in the biblical narrative as a result of the Babylonian exile (e.g.: Halvorson/Taylor 2016). For the same cyclical view of history in Ephrem, see §4.1.2.

changed his strategy from one of open enmity, through the persecutions, to one of deception, through internal strife; and yet Gregory fails to pinpoint a precise moment when this change happened. There could be many candidates, from Constantine's conversion, to the death of Julian, who had renewed the persecutions, to the passage from Gregory the Elder's generation, when a bishop could still be a simple man, to Gregory of Nazianzus's own generation, when theology was fundamental, to the accession of Theodosius, ending Valens's persecutions of the Nicene party and enabling those same Nicene, whom Gregory addressed in the council, to take power. However, the vagueness of Gregory's description suggests that, far less than implying a particular moment, the poet is trying to latch on to an archetypical process, one that could be found at work in Scripture but also in Greek doctrines on the cycle of constitutions and the decline of empires.

3.1.4.2 A proto-Evagrian list of vices in Gregory (II, 1, 17, 83–88)

For all his attention to the historical process of moral decadence, Gregory spends surprisingly few words to address the type of moral leadership a bishop should exercise. As we shall see (§3.2; §5), much of his reflection on morality is either linked to asceticism and hence to his self-portrait or expressed in a negative way through invective against immoral prelates. The only summary I could find of the kind of moral discipline the bishop should impart is in the elegiac poem on the two forms of life:

> Οὐ χόλον αἰχμάσας, οὐ σώματος αἰθομένοιο
> Λύσσαν ἐπιψύξας, οὐ χέρα μαινομένην
> Πᾶσιν ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίοισι, λόγου δεσμοῖσι πεδήσας, (85)
> Οὐ ψευδῆ κραδίης δόξαν ἀποσκεδάσας,
> Οὐ τύφον οἰδαίνοντα διδάγμασιν ἐς χθόνα ῥίψας
> Οὐ πηγαῖς δακρύων δάκρυον ἐκκαλέσας.
> (II, 1, 17, 83–88)

> not wounding the rage, not quenching the fury
> of the burning body, not fettering with reason
> the hand raging all over other people's property, (85)
> not scattering false conceit from the heart,
> not throwing on the floor with teaching swelling delusion,
> not calling forth tears with floods of tears

The passage occurs as Gregory describes the life of the immoral bishop, a life he is renouncing in order to retreat and live as an ascetic. In so doing, he implies that the other bishops are engaged in precisely such a life. This context explains why the statements in our passage are negative: Gregory lists here the omissions of the immoral bishop faced with his duties[162].

Six actions are listed, five of which consist in curbing a behaviour or inner disposition, while the sixth encourages another behaviour. The person in whom the behav-

162 On this peculiar technique of II, 1, 17, see §5.1.1.

iours should be curbed is not specified, and, apart from the sixth action, we could read the passage as a list of self-improvements required of the ascetic bishop. However, the sixth proposition, "calling forth tears with floods of tears" (88), implies a relationship between two or more people, since there would be no point in "calling forth tears" if one were already crying ("with floods of tears"). Hence, it is likely that the five remaining clauses point to the bishop's relationship with the faithful in his congregation.

Regarding the list of curbed characters, there are details to be noted. First, rage (χόλος) is first in line, a witness to the ever-present fear of this antisocial emotion in a society with steep hierarchies[163]. Second, the list of vices has similarities with Evagrius's "evil thoughts" (λογισμοί): χόλος corresponds to wrath (ὀργή or θυμός), the "fury of the body" (σώματος λύσσα) to lust and/or gluttony (πορνεία, γαστριμαργία), the "hand raging in what is not ours" (χέρα μαινομένην ἐπ' ἀλλοτρίοισι) to greed (φιλαργυρία). The role of the "false conceit" (ψευδής δόξα) and of the "swelling delusion" (τῦφος οἰδαίνων) is a bit more difficult to assess. In the case of ψευδής δόξα, the difficulty lies in the word δόξα, which can be intended in a doctrinal or in a moral sense. Pertaining to doctrine, ψευδής δόξα would correspond to heresy, but pertaining to morality, it would be a hexametric rewriting of the word κενοδοξία, "vainglory". In this second sense, the expression would have more or less the same sense as the following τῦφος οἰδαίνων, meaning an ill-founded exaggeration of one's own worth. If we consider that in Evagrius's classification "pride" (ὑπερηφανία) and "vainglory" (κενοδοξία), though linked, are distinct, then it is possible that ψευδής δόξα corresponds to κενοδοξία and τῦφος οἰδαίνων to ὑπερηφανία[164]. In this case, five or six out of eight *logismoi* are present in the list; the remaining two, "bitterness" (λύπη) and "despondency" (ἀκηδία), seem more linked to anchoritic life, and therefore unlikely to be the object of the bishop's action towards laymen[165].

Another similarity between Gregory's and Evagrius's doctrine lies in the remedies. Gregory suggests that the Christian leader should oppose evil tendencies with their contrary: he should "wound" rage (αἰχμάσας, 83), as one wounds an enemy in battle[166]; he should "cool down", "quench" (ἐπιψύξας, 84) the "burning body" (αἰθομένοιο σώματος); he should bind with fetters (δεσμοῖσι πεδήσας, 85) the hand of greed, and finally, he

163 See Brown 1992, 48–58.

164 See Evagr. Pont. *mal. cog.* 13–15.

165 Evagr. Pont. *mal. cog.* 11. After all, Guillaumont/Guillaumont 1971, 63–84, based on a long discussion, concludes that Evagrius' list of eight evil thoughts is his original development on a previous tradition, which can be traced through Stoicism, Gnosticism, New Testament and apocryphal Jewish writings until Origen (and, I would add, Gregory), of listing virtues and vices. And, of all thoughts in Evagrius' list, the most original is indeed ἀκηδία, so that Gregory omitting it from his list here proves this originality. As regards Gregory's list, maybe the passage nearest to his choice of vices and order comes from Origen: *unde mihi videtur esse infinitus quidam numerus contrariarum virtutum pro eo quod per singulos paene homines sunt spiritus aliqui, diversa in his peccatorum genera molientes. Verbi causa, est aliqui fornicationis spiritus* [= σώματος λύσση]*, est et irae* [= χόλος]*, spiritus alius est avaritiae* [= μαινομένη χείρ] *alius vero superbiae* [= ψευδὴς δόξη/τῦφος οἰδαίνων] (Orig. *in Jos. hom.* 15, 5).

166 The verb is epic and employed for the "throwing" of a spear (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 45, *s.v.* αἰχμάζω).

should "throw on the floor" (ἐς χθόνα ῥίψας, 87) the elation of pride. These expressions seem to imply a therapy of the contrary like that proposed by Evagrius, who often advises the monk to "cut" one evil thought with another one that is its contrary (e.g., pride or vainglory is repelled by the shame of lust)[167].

The concrete mean of the bishop is expressed by two words in these lines: "word" (λόγου, 85) and "teachings" (διδάγμασιν, 87). The term λόγος here should be interpreted with all its different meanings at once, not only as "word" in the sense of a voiced utterance, but as "conversation," "discourse," and "reason": the bishop should try to "talk to reason" his faithful. However, besides these lines and the long discussion on the doctrinal duties of bishops at II, 1, 12, Gregory—like Ephrem—tends to highlight the importance of the bishop's example for the morality of the congregation, much more than the bishop's preaching. The insistence on setting a good example is an important argument supporting strict meritocracy in the election of bishops, and therefore the exclusion of hasty consecrations of powerful laymen, like Nectarius[168].

Gregory concludes his list of vices the bishop should remedy with the sentence "calling forth tears with floods of tears" (88). This clause means that the bishop should elicit repentance in the congregation, and he should do so not with fire-and-brimstone preaching, but by his own penitent attitude and by participation in the repentance of others. Such a short utterance can communicate this complex message thanks to its tight links with famous scriptural passages. The idea of deep participation of the bishop in his faithful's sorrow is conveyed by the polyptoton δακρύων δάκρυον, which recalls the attitude that Paul commends in Rom. 12:15 (κλαίειν μετὰ κλαιόντων) and that he elsewhere says he himself practices (see 1Cor. 9:22: ἐγενόμην τοῖς ἀσθενέσιν ἀσθενής, ἵνα τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς κερδήσω· τοῖς πᾶσιν γέγονα πάντα, ἵνα πάντως τινὰς σώσω; 2Cor. 11:29: τίς ἀσθενεῖ καὶ οὐκ ἀσθενῶ; τίς σκανδαλίζεται καὶ οὐκ ἐγὼ πυροῦμαι;). After all, Paul was Gregory's model of the perfect bishop[169].

"Tears", on the other side, refer in Gregory's line to repentance and penance, according to a widespread Christian tradition which saw in tears the primary expression of contrition and a manifestation of repentance, a tradition based on biblical passages such as Ps. 6:7 (in the Septuaginta: ἐν δάκρυσίν μου τὴν στρωμνήν μου βρέξω) and 41:4 (ἐγενήθη μοι τὰ δάκρυά μου ἄρτος ἡμέρας καὶ νυκτὸς) or Peter's repentance (Mt. 26:75; Lc. 22:62) and the tears of the sinful woman (Lc. 7:38; 44)[170]. Hence, in this line we find

167 Sorabji 2000, 360–361; Knuuttila 2004, 142n111.

168 The necessity of good example has been examined at §2.2.3.

169 See Greg. Naz. *or.* 2, 7, 52–56, in particular: τίς ἂν ἀξίως διέλθοι τὴν καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιστασίαν, τὴν τῶν καθ' ἕκαστον κηδεμονίαν, τὴν μέριμναν πασῶν τῶν Ἐκκλησιῶν, τὸ πρὸς πάντας συμπαθὲς καὶ φιλάδελφον; Προσέκοπτέ τις, καὶ Παῦλος ἠσθένει· καὶ ἄλλος ἐσκανδαλίζετο, καὶ Παῦλος ἦν ὁ φλεγόμενος (53); Elm 2000a, 87.

170 See Lampe 1961, 331–332, *s.v.* δάκρυον; in particular: Ἐλθέ μοι, ὦ δακρύων τε καθάρσιε νειόθι πηγὴ (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 46, 27); Οἶδα καὶ πέμπτον [βάπτισμα] ἔτι, τὸ τῶν δακρύων (*or.* 39, 17). The link between tears and baptism is found also in one of our poems: Νῦν δ' οὐδὲν οἶδα φάρμακον πλὴν δακρύων, / Ἐξ ὧν

the only explicit reference to the bishop's power to accept penance in the poems: as is customary in fourth-century precepts to bishops on this topic, Gregory advises a meek and participatory attitude for the prelate[171]. An indirect recommendation of meekness can be found in II, 1, 12, 423, where Gregory describes the new and bad bishop as apparently ἥμερος, "mild"[172]: this presupposes that mildness is a virtue in the bishop, and since it is mentioned in connection to his function of judge and arbiter and since that function is strongly linked with his penitential task, Gregory presupposes mildness as a virtue for the bishop as minister of penitence, in accordance with contemporary theorisations. However, these remarks remain rather isolated in Gregory's poems, and this theme has significantly less importance than it has for Ephrem.

In general, we must note the conspicuous absence of one of Gregory's favourite themes in relation to priesthood—namely, spiritual direction for individuals. This is clear from the absence of the medical metaphor and the already remarked refusal of a "Protean" bishop, who adapts himself to his target audience. Such a behaviour was admitted in other contexts as a help to different individuals in the different stages of their spiritual journey[173]. This may be due to a difference in the audience: while speeches were addressed to the community at large and described its relationship with the bishop, Gregory's poems are addressed to the other bishops and are more interested in their personal qualifications for the charge; hence the stress on teaching by example.

3.1.4.3 The style of leadership in Ephrem

I will now examine Ephrem's views on the moral leadership of the bishop, beginning with meekness or charity, as a kind of bridge from the treatment of Gregory, and continuing with the analysis of modes, or styles, of leadership endorsed (or censured) by the poet. Then, I will close §3.1 with an account of the content of the moral teaching of the bishops according to Ephrem (§3.1.4.4). The poet treats the questions of moral and disciplinary leadership differently in the two different groups of poems on bishops: in the poems composed during Valgash's episcopate (*CN* 13–16), his main focus is defending Valgash, whereas in the poems for Abraham (*CN* 17–21) he sets out a more general program for an ideal bishop. Since the main accusation thrown against Valgash was his excessive leniency, Ephrem organises the discourse around this theme differently in these poems than he does in the poems for Abraham[174]. For Abraham, meekness is just

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συνούλωσις μὲν ἔρχεται μόγις (II, 1, 12, 497–498). Tears are described as a "second Baptism" also in the Syriac poems on Abraham Kidunaia (*Abr. Kid.* 4, 1).

171 On the prevalence of meekness as an episcopal virtue in contemporary treatises and canonical writings, especially in connection with penance: Sterk 2004, 62–63; Rapp 2005, 26, 96, 125, 169–171.

172 ὡς ἥμερός μοι σήμερον (II, 1, 12, 423). For this passage, see §5.2.2.

173 See Elm 2000a; Gautier 2002, 118. See §2.2.3.2 and §2.2.4.7.

174 Gregory, too, was accused to be too meek—at least so does he say—because he forgave those who tried to stone him: Τί σκαιὸν, ἢ πρόσαντες, ἢ βλάβην φέρον, / Ἤ εἶπον, ἢ ἔπραξα τοῦτ' ἔτος τρίτον; / Πλὴν ἔν γε τοῦτο, τῶν κακῶν ἐφεισάμην, / Ὑφ' ὧν λιθασθεὶς εἰσόδου προοίμιον / Ἐκαρτέρησα. Καὶ γὰρ

one virtue among many the bishop must have. For Valgash, on the other side, meekness is a defining characteristic, something he possesses to the utmost degree and that differentiates him from his predecessors. Here, we see a treatment like the one reserved for preaching and teaching: it is true that Ephrem requires any bishop to be meek, as well as that he requires bishops to be sound teachers; but it is also true that he describes Valgash as extraordinarily meek, as well as particularly gifted for the intellectual component of his ministry.

Three passages exemplify Ephrem's discourse on Valgash's meekness:

8 ܫܡܫܐ ܕܡܫܬܚܠܦ ܒܬܪܐ ܕܝ ܫܡܫܐ ܕܡܫܬܚܠܦ ܒܬܪܐ ܕܝ
ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܫܦܝܪ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܫܦܝܪ ܐܝܟ
ܕܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܝܟ ܒܪܝܬܐ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܝܟ[175]

9 ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܡܠܝܠ ܐܝܟ ܡܢ ܩܕܡ ܡܠܝܠ ܐܝܟ
ܕܡܫܬܟܚ ܐܝܟ ܕܡܫܬܟܚ ܐܝܟ
ܕܐܬܐ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܐܝܟ ܕܐܬܐ ܠܡܥܒܕ ܐܝܟ

ܫܡܫܐ ܐܦ ܫܠܝܫ ܬܠܬ ܙܒܢ ܫܡܫܐ ܐܦ ܫܠܝܫ ܬܠܬ ܙܒܢ
ܒܪܝܫ ܫܦܝܪ ܐܝܟ ܒܪܝܫ ܫܦܝܪ ܐܝܟ
ܒܨܦܪ ܩܠܝܠ ܐܝܟ ܒܨܦܪ ܩܠܝܠ ܐܝܟ[176]

(*CN* 13, 8–9)

εὐσεβέστερον / Παθόντα τὰ Χριστοῦ με οὕτω καὶ φέρειν. / Ὁρᾷς, πένητες οἷα δωροῦνται Θεῷ. / Καὶ τοῦτο δ' ἔγκλημ', εἰ δοκεῖ, ποιώμεθα (II, 1, 12, 100–107). See §5.1.2.3.

175 Beck prints: *w-'a(y)k lbryt' d-'etgamrat* (Beck 1961a, 35). The first problem is that the particle *'a(y)k* does not take the preposition *l-*; therefore, the group of consonants *lbryt'* cannot be construed as *la-brītā* (as Beck proposes in the note to his translation: Beck 1961b, 41n6, translating "Schöpfung"/"Geschöpf"). Either the *l-* is to expunge, or the word—though clearly written in the manuscript—must be changed. Expunging the *l-* would leave us with Beck's favourite translation, "creation", "creature": the end (*šullāmā*) of the sun would be "soft and mild like a creature/the Creation that is perfected/destroyed", depending on the interpretation of the verb *'tgmrt*, "perfected" is the *etpeel*, *'etgamrat*, while "destroyed" is the *etpaal*, *'etgammrat*. Fraenkel (as per Beck 1961a, 35 *apparatus criticus*) proposes *kebrītā*, meaning "sulphur", however it is not clear what the expression "sulphur that is perfected/destroyed" should mean. The *apparatus* of Beck's edition gives the *vox nihili šabrītā* as Rücker's proposal, whereas the note to the translation has the (correct) *nabreštā.* Beck, agreeing with Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2274, *s.v.* ܢܒܪܫܬܐ (and with the ancient lexicographers he lists) translates this term with *flamma*, whereas Sokoloff 2009, 886, *s.v.* ܢܒܪܫܬܐ (as well as the CAL lexicon: http://cal.huc.edu, last accessed: 27/03/21, 15:20) gives the meaning "lamp-stand", "lamp", "candelabrum" or "fireplace". According to Ciancaglini 2008, 211, *s.v.* ܢܒܪܫܬܐ, it is a loanword from Old Persian **nibrāšti-*, meaning "lamp". The Syriac word may well have preserved this meaning, however the text passages given by Brockelmann (and repeated by Ciancaglini and the CAL) work way better with the meaning "flame" than with "candelabrum" or "fireplace". A third possibility would be to correct *lbryt'* in *lmpyd'* and obtain the meaning "lamp": the corrupted reading, although apparently *difficilior*, would be explained because it gives the ending *-yt'* of a feminine noun, in accordance with the following *'etgammrat*, whereas the word *lampēdā* is normally masculine and only rarely feminine (Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1957, *s.v.* ܠܡܦܕܐ). The setting sun is compared to a faded lamp, peaceful (*nīḥ*, 6) because the fire has gone, but also pleasurable (*bassīm*, 6) because the vessel is still slightly warm.

176 "Even the sun shows / three forms in quarters three: // quick and bright his beginning, / strong and harsh his middle, // and like a consumed lamp / soft and mild his end. /// Swift and bright his beginning, / which came to the sleepers to wake them, // hot and harsh his middle, / coming to ripen the fruits, // gentle and mild his end / because it has reached his perfection."

18 ܩܕܡܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܠܫܒܪܬܐ ܡܚܒܒ ܗܘܐ ܘܡܕܚܠ ܗܘܐ
ܡܨܥܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܠܛܠܝܬܐ ܟܐܐ ܗܘܐ ܘܡܚܕܐ ܗܘܐ
ܐܚܪܝܐ ܐܝܟ ܕܠܡܠܦܬܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܗ̇ ܢܝܚܐ ܘܒܣܝܡܘܬܐ

19 ܐܦ ܪܡܐ ܨܝܕ ܒܪܬ ܝܥܩܘܒ ܫܕܠܐ ܘܫܒܛܐ ܠܛܠܝܘܬܗ̇
ܘܠܚܘܨܦܗ̇ ܘܥܠܝܡܘܬܗ̇ ܫܘܬܦ ܣܝܦܐ ܘܢܡܘܣܐ
ܘܐܝܟ ܠܪܕܝܬܐ ܘܡܠܦܬܐ ܐܬܐ ܠܗ̇ ܢܝܚܐ ܘܒܣܝܡܘܬܐ[177]
(*CN* 14, 18–19)

17 ܒܚܘܨܦܐ ܘܕܪܓܐ ܕܛܠܝܘܬܐ ܡܪܒܝܢܐ ܕܚܝܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܠܝ
ܫܒܛܗ ܙܓܪܢ ܡܢ ܫܥܝܐ ܘܡܢ ܣܘܪܚܢܐ ܣܘܪܕܗ
ܘܡܢ ܦܘܢܩܐ ܕܘܚܠܗ

18 ܐܒܐ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܝܗܒ ܠܥܠܝܡܘܬܝ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܝ ܡܢ ܛܠܝܘܬܐ
ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܡܢ ܩܫܝܘܬܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܝ ܡܢ ܣܒܘܬܐ
ܐܝܬ ܗܘܐ ܒܗ ܡܟܝܟܘܬܐ

19 ܟܕ ܐܬܥܠܝܬ ܡܢ ܕܪ̈ܓܐ ܕܛܠܝܘܬܐ ܘܥܠܝܡܘܬܐ
ܥܒܪ ܣܘܪܕܐ ܩܕܡܝܐ ܥܒܪ ܕܘܚܠܐ ܬܢܝܢܐ
ܝܗܒ ܠܝ ܪܥܝܐ ܒܣܝܡܐ[178]
(*CN* 16, 17–19)

These passages treat the same theme in three slightly different ways. The first employs the sustained metaphor of the sun; the second sketches the argument through one of Ephrem's typical tripartite stanzas; and finally, the third develops the theme by devoting a whole stanza to each bishop. *CN* 13, 8 introduces the theme in two lines (1–2), then devotes one line each for the first and second stages (3–4) and two lines for the third (5–6), amplifying it through a simile. Stanza 9 is almost perfectly symmetrical: oddly numbered lines begin with two adjectives as predicates and the names "beginning", "middle," and "end" as subjects; evenly numbered lines are relative clauses, the first two (2 and 4) symmetrically built. *CN* 14, 18 is similarly constructed, perfectly symmetrical until the last line. The following stanza is much more varied, but its last line is a reprise of the last line of the previous stanza. In *CN* 16, every bishop has a stanza, and every stanza has a slightly different structure: in stanza 17 the first two lines stand out as the introduction, and the following three are a list of attributes; stanza 18 parallels the first two lines of stanza 17 in its first line, while the remaining four lines are organ-

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[177] The first, as by a toddler, / was loved and was feared, // the middle, as to a child, / rebuked and brought joy, // the last, as for an educated girl, / for her was relief and kindness. /// Even for Jacob's daughter was set / bait and stick to her childhood, // and to her youthful boldness / was given sword and rule, // until, as chastised and learned, / came to her relief and kindness."

[178] "In rashness and in the age of infancy / I had a feared foster father, // whose stick kept me from jest, / and from vice his terror, // and from delicacy his fear. /// He gave a second father to my youth / and, because I was a bit childish, // he had a bit of toughness, / because I was a bit elderly, // he had meekness. /// When I was lifted from the ages / of infancy and youth, // the former terror passed, / passed the following fear, // and he gave me a mild pastor."

ised in two contrasting couplets; finally, stanza 19 has the content of *CN* 16, 17, 1–2 and 18, 1 spread across its first, second, and last lines, while the two lines in the middle parallel and contrast with the list in stanza 17[179].

Apart from these complex syntactic structures, the argument remains the same, even if the words employed vary, and it can be summarised through a table:

	Stage of the community	Stage of the bishop	Attitude of the bishop
***CN* 13, 8**		Beginning (*šūrāyā*) Middle (*mṣa'tā*) End (*šullāmā*)	Quick and bright (*ḥarrīp*, *zhē*) Strong and harsh (*'azzīzā*, *qašyā*) Soft and mild (*nīḥ*, *bassīm*)
***CN* 13, 9**	Sleepers (*damkē*) Fruits (*pērē*) Perfection (*gmīrūtā*)	Beginning (*šūrāyā*) Middle (*mṣa'tā*) End (*šullāmā*)	Swift and bright (*qallīl*, *zhē*) Hot and harsh (*ḥammīmā*, *qašyā*) Gentle and mild (*rḥīm*, *bassīm*)
***CN* 14, 18**	Toddler (*šbartā*) Child (*ṭlītā*) Educated girl (*malptā*)	First (*qadmāyā*) Middle (*meṣ'āyā*) Last ((*'a*)*ḥrāyā*)	Loved, feared (*mḥabbab*, *mdaḥḥal*) Rebuked, brought joy (*kāyē*, *mḥaddē*) Relief and kindness (*nyāḥā*, *bassīmā*)
***CN* 14, 19**	Childhood (*ṭalyūtā*) Youthful boldness (*ḥuṣpā*,*'laymūtā*) Chastised and learned (*rdītā*, *malptā*)		Bait and stick (*šedlā*, *šabṭā*) Sword and rule (*saypā*, *nāmōsā*) Relief and kindness (*nyāḥā*, *bassīmā*)
***CN* 16**	Rashness, infancy (*ḥūṣpā*, *ṭalyūtā*) Youth (*'laymūtā*) Lifted from (*'et'allēt men*)	Foster father (*mrabbyānā*) Second father (*'abbā 'ḥrēnā*) Pastor (*rā'yā*)	Feared, stick, terror, fear (*dḥīlā*, *šabṭā*, *surrādā*, *duḥḥālā*) toughness, meekness (*qašyūtā*, *makkīkūtā*) Mild (*bassīmā*)

Through this table, we can best appreciate Ephrem's artful variations and repetitions. *CN* 13, 8 and 9 have the same descriptors for the phases of "solar" (= episcopal) activity, but stanza 9 adds also the aims of these activities; each stanza has a pair of predicates for the activity of the sun in the three phases, with stanza 9 repeating one of the two predicates and replacing the other with a synonym with the same vocalic structure (*ḥarrīp*>*qallīl*; *'azzīzā*>*ḥammīmā*; *nīḥ*>*rḥīm*). *CN* 14, 18 and 19 end with two very similar lines: the first has *hwā l-āh* as predicate, the second has *'etā*. Both describe the last stage for the community as *malptā*, but they reach the same ending differently, and it is particularly remarkable that the root *ṭ-l-y* ("young") is employed for the second stage of the community at *CN* 14, 18 and repeated for the first stage at *CN* 14, 19; then again the root *ṭ-l-y* is employed for the first stage, but this time the characteristic of *ḥuṣpā* is not given to the second but to the first stage. Moreover, it is to be noted that Ephrem's picture is not always consist-

179 For a look on this kind of rhetorical devices through the lens of discourse analysis, see Stevenson 2016.

ent: at *CN* 13, he seems to imply that Jacob's episcopate was moderate, Babu's very harsh, and Valgash's mild; the same impression is conveyed by *CN* 14, 19, where Jacob's "stick" (*šabṭā*) is balanced by his "bait" (*šedlā*); in contrast, *CN* 16 implies that Jacob was the strictest bishop, Babu moderate, and Valgash mild, whereas in *CN* 14, 18 both Babu and Jacob are moderates and Valgash is mild. This inconsistency can be partly explained by Babu's small importance, but it may be also consciously pursued: on one side, it highlights the most important thing—namely, that after stern discipline, Valgash has brought mildness; on the other, it allows Ephrem to play with synonyms and variations with more freedom. It is likely that this lexical abundance—the repetitions and the skilful variations—had an aesthetic value and was one of the sought-for elements of poetry.

The table demonstrates not only the artful variation and repetition of terms but also that these passages are organised around the same argument: meekness is not associated with the bishop's role in administering penance, but rather with his broader educational and leading tasks; furthermore, meekness is by no means necessary, but rather an attitude which is to be used only if the situation requires it. In particular, meekness is inserted in the scheme of the congregation's spiritual development through its history. According to this, a mild bishop is fit only when the congregation has already progressed in the faith, whereas in her first steps she needs stern leaders. It is remarkable, however, that in these passages adopting a mild or a stern attitude is much less a decision or a conscious approach by the bishop than an invariable part of his character, so that God disposes the succession of bishops with different attitudes according to the growth of the church. In Gregory, it was quite the contrary: the poet presented himself as a moralizing voice *for* the bishop (and, eventually, for the elite faithful who should keep the bishops in check). Ephrem, on the other hand, speaks of the bishops and their attitudes as a given, arguing for the acceptance of this given by the community.

This attitude of Ephrem is clearer at *CN* 15, 14–15, where this theme is explicitly linked to the conflict between Valgash and the community through a rebuke against the same community:

14	ܠܗܝܢ ܕܢܫ ܫܘܚܠܦ ܡܢ ܕܢܫ ܕܒܫܥܐ ܕܐܬܐ ܕܒܫܥ ܒܚܕ ܕܒܫܠܡܐ ܫܒܝܥ ܕܒܫ
15	ܫܠܡ ܕܡ ܢܫܐ ܒܪܝܫ ܕܒܫ ܕܒܫ ܫܠܡ ܒܚܕ ܒܫܥܐ ܕ ܒܫ ܚܫܒ ܒܫ ܒܫ ܕ ܕܒܫ ܒܫ ܒܫ ܒܫ ܕ (*CN* 15, 14–15)

In stanza 14, Ephrem employs a metaphor similar to the simile at *CN* 13, 8–9, but here the subject is not the sun, symbolizing the bishop, but rather the fruit, symbolizing the

180 "The fruit [*pērā*] is chastised forcibly [*b-ʿuzz-eh*] / at the beginning [*b-šūrāyā*] by the blowing wind, // and in the middle [*ba-mṣaʿtā*] by the force [*ʿuzzā*] of sun, / and when his forcing [*ʿazzīzūt-eh*] will be past, // his end will be thick in sweetness. /// It is us, then, whom the beginnings [*qadmāyē*] chastised, /

community. Thus, if the metaphor describes the "natural" course of things through a natural image, then stanza 15 contradicts this natural course in the case of the community, thereby construing the community's behaviour as unnatural. However, the ideal progress remains the same for the community as well as for the bishop: from a regimen based on chastisement and power to one based on "sweetness" (*ḥalyūtā* here)[181].

In the poems for Abraham (*CN* 17–21), the theme of meekness appears among concerns different from those of the poems for Valgash, and, in part, the approach is more general. In one stanza, meekness has a very general significance:

ܡܢ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܟܗܢܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܟܗܢܘܬܐ ܕܝܢ
ܕܬܪܝܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܢܣܒ ܠܐ ܫܦܝܪ ܗܘ ܕܬܪܝܗܘܢ ܡܢ ܕܢܣܒ ܠܐ ܫܦܝܪ ܗܘ ،
ܕܢܫܬܘܦ ܒܗ ܡܬܩܠ ܕܢܫܬܘܦ ܒܗ ܡܬܩܠ
ܕܢܫܬܘܦ ܒܗ ܡܬܩܠ ܕܢܫܬܘܦ ܒܗ ܡܬܩܠ
ܕܟܗܢܘܬܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܫܝܠ ܕܢܫܬܘܦ ܒܗ ܡܬܩܠ
ܕܡܠܟܘܬܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܩܫܝܐ ܕܟܗܢܘܬܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܒܫܝܠ
ܒܫܝܠ ܕܡܠܟܘܬܢ ܢܗܘܐ ܩܫܝܐ[182]
(*CN* 21, 22)

Here, meekness serves as a distinguishing point between ecclesiastical authority and secular authority: by "kingship" (*malkūtā*) Ephrem means the authority of the Roman emperor, whereas "priesthood" (*kāhnūtā*) means episcopal authority. It is remarkable that in this stanza he repeats the words that characterised Valgash in the previous poems—in particular, the root *b-s-m* (adjective *bassīm*, verb *bsam*, lines 5 and 8), which was always associated with Valgash (see *CN* 13, 8, 6; 9, 5; *CN* 14, 18, 6; 19, 6; *CN* 16, 5)—and employs them for episcopal authority in general. On the contrary, various words associated with Babu and Jacob are employed for imperial authority, expressing its stern and burdensome quality[183]. One could think that this verbal link implies a parallel between Jacob and the emperors, whereas Valgash and Abraham embody the paradigmatic bishop. This, however, contradicts much of Ephrem's characterisation of Jacob as a model bishop. Rather, the diachronic contrast between Jacob's sternness and Valgash's meekness, as well as the synchronic contrast between the emperor's forceful authority and the bishop's mildness, reflects a more basic pattern of Ephrem's thought. The same pattern can be discerned in his utterances on the relationship between the two Testaments, as some stanzas from *CN* 16 prove:

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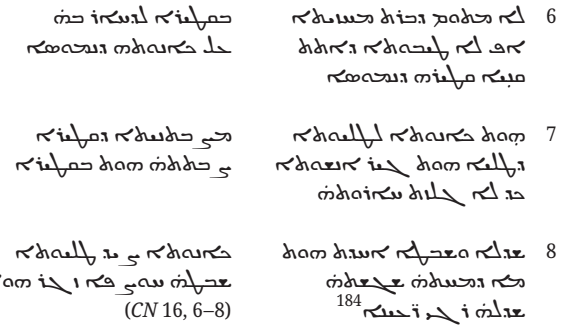
and then chided us the middle [*meṣ'āyē*], // the endings [(*'a*)*hrāyē*] increased our sweetness,, / but when our taste came, // our loss of flavour was greater."

181 The theme has already been seen at §2.2.3.3 and will be deeper investigated at §4.1–2.

182 "From kingship the laws [*nāmōsē*] / and from priesthood the atonements [*ḥussāyē*]: // That both should incline is hideous, / that both should be stern [*ne'zān*] is harsh [*qašyā*]; // Let one be stern [*te'az*] and one be mild [*tebsam*] / with sense and with discernment, // may fear [*deḥlā*] be tempered with love [*raḥmē*]: / may our priesthood be mild [*bassīmā*], // as our kingship stern [*'azzīzā*]. / **Blessed is he who tempered our aids!**"

183 *Nāmōsā*: *CN* 14, 19, 4 and *CN* 21, 22, 1; *qašyā*: *CN* 13, 8, 4 and *CN* 21, 22, 4; root *'-z-z*, realised as verb *'az* (*CN* 21, 22, 4–5) or as adjective *'azzīz*: *CN* 13, 8, 4 and *CN* 21, 22, 9; root *d-ḥ-l* (meaning "fear"): *CN* 14, 18, 2 (*mdaḥḥal*); *CN* 16, 17, 2 (*dḥil*) and *CN* 21, 22, 7 (*deḥlā*).



6	ܠܐ ܡܬܘܡ ܕܒܪܬ ܡܚܙܝܬܐ	ܒܩܛܝܪܐ ܠܕܚܙܐ ܒܗ̇
	ܐܦ ܠܐ ܛܝܒܘܬܐ ܕܐܬܬ	ܥܠ ܟܐܢܘܬܗ ܕܢܡܘܣܐ
	ܡܒܥܐ ܩܛܝܪܗ ܕܢܡܘܣܐ	
7	ܗܘܬ̣ ܟܐܢܘܬܐ ܠܛܠܝܘܬܐ	ܡܨܒܬܢܝܬܐ ܕܩܛܝܪܐ
	ܕܛܠܝܐ ܗܘܬ ܓܝܪ ܐܢܫܘܬܐ	ܨܒܬܬܗ̇ ܗܘܬ ܒܩܛܝܪܐ
	ܟܕ ܠܐ ܓܢܒܬ ܚܐܪܘܬܗ̇	
8	ܫܕܠܐ ܘܫܒܛܐ ܐܚܝܕܬ ܗܘܬ	ܟܐܢܘܬܐ ܨܝܕ ܛܠܝܘܬܐ
	ܟܡܐ ܕܡܚܬܗ̇ ܫܦܝܬܗ̇	ܫܒܛܗ̇ ܚܘܨܦܐ ܪܟܢ ܗܘܐ
	ܫܕܠܗ̇ ܪܟܟ ܪ̈ܥܝܢܐ[184]	(*CN* 16, 6–8)

These stanzas bear striking resemblances with the stanzas on the meekness of bishops: the same diachronic scheme of infancy (*ṭalyūtā*) and maturity (*gmīrūtā*; see *CN* 16, 10, 1), the same expression "bait and stick" (*šedlā w-šabṭā*), and the same problem of "rashness" (*ḥuṣpā*) are applied to the passage from the law to the grace. That the theme here is law and grace is made clear by the use of Paul's very words for these concepts (*nāmōsā*, "law", and "grace", *ṭaybūtā*) and by the contrast between "justice" (*kēnūtā*) and "grace", which is typical of Ephrem's theology[185].

The pattern of connotations common to these different themes is this: Ephrem contrasts two states, the first characterised by compulsion, discipline, fear, and relationships based on power, the second marked by freedom, maturity, love, and relationships based on mercy. The archetype of this pattern is the substitution of Moses's law with the gospel, a concept that, with all its ramifications, plays a central role in Syriac theology—especially in the earlier times[186]. The adherence of our case to the archetype is strikingly clear at *CN* 21, 22, 1–2: "From kingship the laws [*nāmōsē*] / and from priesthood the atonements [*ḥussāyē*]". One could substitute "Moses" for "kingship" and "Christ" for "priesthood", and the result would be something similar to Joh. 1:17 (see also Rom. 3:25). The use of this pattern in comparing emperor and bishops differs from its archetypical use and from the case of the

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[184] "Never did a mirror compel / with violence its observer, // nor is the Mercy that came / upon the Justice of the Law // compulsory as the Law. /// Justice [*kēnūtā*] was for childhood [*ṭalyūtā*] / the adorner of compulsion [*da-qṭīrā*]; // for, since mankind was a child [*ṭalyā*], / she adorned it through compulsion [*ba-qṭīrā*], // while not purloining its freedom. /// Bait and stick [*šedlā w-šabṭā*] had taken / Justice for that childhood [*kēnūtā ṣēd ṭalyūtā*]: // whenever she struck her, she soothed her; / her stick [*šabṭ-āh*] curbed the rashness [*ḥuṣpā*], // her bait [*šedl-āh*] softened the minds."

[185] For the contrast between grace and law, two examples among the many that could be quoted: "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law [*nāmōsā*], but under grace [*ṭaybūtā*]" (Rom. 6:14); "For the law (*nāmōsā*) was given by Moses, but grace (*ṭaybūtā*) and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Joh. 1:17). The use of the verb *'etā* in the phraseology "the Grace that came" (*CN* 16, 6, 3) may hint at expressions like *mār-an 'etā* (1Cor. 16:22) and at the Incarnation (see Joh. 1:8, *l-dīl-eh 'ētā* [scil. *nuhrā*]). On the importance of the binomial "Justice"-"Grace" (*kēnūtā/ṭaybūtā*) for Ephrem: Martikainen 1981.

[186] On the fundamental role of this concept in Syriac theology, in particular as regards ecclesiology, see Murray 2006, 41. The same paradigm is applied to the contrast between nature and mind: Ephr. Syr. *hymn. fid.* 28, 4.

evolution of the community because the latter is a historical development, whereas the former opposes two orders existing at the same time, the religious and the secular power.

It is true that, in opposing "priesthood" and "kingship" in their respective qualities of mediation of the atonement and giving of law, Ephrem alludes to the biblical distinction of kings and priests; however, the opposition of fear and love that he attaches to biblical categories invites us to read the "atonement" (*ḥussāyā*) of bishops more broadly than as a reference to purely ritual tasks. The poet wants to stress that ecclesiastical leadership, *because* of its ritual tasks, must move on a plain wholly different from secular power, a plain whose main character is mercy and where relationships rest on the freedom of those involved rather than on compulsion. This means that the bishop should be much more lenient than the imperial official.

This partially contradicts Ephrem's representation of Babu and Jacob as stern, which suggests that these oppositions (between mildness and sternness) should not be taken as absolute definitions, but as highlighting a dialectical opposition of two terms, without implying that the "sternness" of a Jacob is in the same order as that of a Roman emperor, even though Jacob is sterner than Valgash and even though the poet describes the emperor and Jacob with the same words. On the other side, it is clear that the ideal situation for the bishop is represented by Valgash's period, where the community has reached maturity. To some extent, the parallel between Jacob and the emperor has merit: the first bishops had to steer a worldly community. Therefore, their leadership had to incorporate elements of worldly rule; thus, the development of a Christian community is its walking away from a worldly regime towards a freer, more peaceful order.

At *CN* 19, 9, Ephrem again employs the language of meekness, linking it to some other themes of his poetry:

ܠܐ ܚܕ ܕܣܡ ܒܚܝܪܘܬܟ ܡܟܟܝܟܐ ܗܝ ܡܫܘܚܬܟ
ܠܐ ܚܕ ܕܟܫ ܒܬܟܝܬܟ ܫܝܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܙܪܥ ܡܠܬܟ
ܠܐ ܚܕ ܕܡܬܒܠ ܒܩܠܟ ܡܬܟܢܝܢ ܗܘ ܕܫܡܥ ܡܠܬܟ
ܠܐ ܚܕ ܕܡܬܟܫܝ ܡܢ ܥܠܬܟ ܕܗܝ ܒܠܚܘܕܗ ܡܬܥܝܦ ܗܘ ܕܫܠܝ ܠܢ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܢܦܫܬܢ[187]

(*CN* 19, 9)

The markers of the language of meekness are the word *bassīmā*, whose importance has already been noted, and the noun *nyāḥā*, "repose", "peace", employed to describe Valgash in the last lines of *CN* 14, 18 and 19. To these, Ephrem adds here two more terms, *makkīkā*, meaning "humble", and *šaynā*, for "peace". Such terms describe qualities similar to those indicated by the other terms we have already encountered. It could also be noted that the term *makkīkā* appeared in the metaphor of the head and the body

187 "No one envied your election, / for humble [*makkīkā*] is your leadership; // no one bristles at your rebuke, / for peace [*šaynā*] sows your word; // no one shrinks from your voice, / for mild [*bassīmā*] is your commanding; // no one complains about your yoke, / for it itself is wearied instead of our necks, // and lightens the burden of our souls. / **Blessed is he who chose you as our repose** [*nyāḥ-an*]!"

at *CN* 18, 4, 7, to express the loving relationship that should link the bishop to his community, as well as the bishop's attitude, which should refrain from a top-down exercise of power and rather provide for the members of the community stooping down to their level (§2.1.2.2; §2.2.3.2): another facet of episcopal meekness. The stanza presents these attributes inside Ephrem's habitual structure of symmetric *cola*, with even-numbered lines corresponding to the previous, odd-numbered ones, each pair of lines being like the others, except for the last, which is longer.

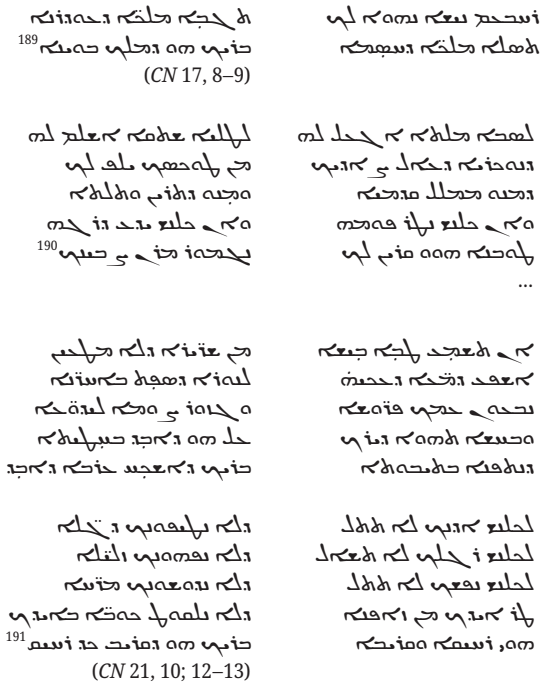
The question posed by the stanza is that of legitimacy: Ephrem must explain why everyone obeys the bishop willingly. In this sense, episcopal meekness disarms not only grudges held by people receiving rebukes or orders (3; 5–7) but also the potential discontent over the election of the young Abraham (1). According to Ephrem, the bishop is so authoritative because he is not authoritarian. Furthermore, he seems prepared to lead by example and to first submit himself to the measures he proposes to others (7–9). Yet this ideal representation of episcopal leadership has more than one element that raises suspicion. The insistence on meekness and humility, for one thing, hints at a church conceiving herself as a free society, where people had to be persuaded to act; modern readers may ask themselves if this conception was true in real life and, conversely, if and how much could the bishop compel his faithful without having to persuade them. Second, there is the obvious point that if the author has to write that no one bears grudges towards or envies the bishop, then someone was certainly bearing grudges towards the bishop. This brings us to the third observation: Ephrem presents these questions as statements of fact, but one wonders how much of these statements would have been perceived as rebuke or advice by the bishop *and* the community who were hearing them. Alas, these are questions we will never answer with an acceptable degree of certainty, since the context of these remarks is all but lost to us[188].

In any case, we perceive that the bishop's decision making was subject to a degree of communitarian, if not public, scrutiny. Furthermore, Ephrem's texts seem to presuppose that the bishop's decision making was disputed, with different people capable of influencing it:

8 ܡܢ ܕܠܝܬ ܒܗ ܚܫܐ ܘܒܗ ܫܘܠܛܢ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܥܠ ܕܒܪ ܚܪܝܬ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܪܥܡ ܒܗ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܕܥ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܒ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܕ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܠܗ

9 ܡܢ ܕܠܝܬ ܒܗ ܚܫܐ ܘܒܗ ܫܘܠܛܢ ܠܝܬ ܠܗ ܒܥܠ ܕܒܪ ܚܪܝܬ ܘܠܐ ܡܬܪܥܡ ܒܗ ܠܐ ܡܫܬܘܕܥ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܒ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܫܕ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܒܥܐ ܠܗ ܠܐ ܡܬܚܣܪ ܠܗ

188 However, there is more to the second question than this passage: Ephrem's texts preserve other traces of early critics of Abraham (see *CN* 18, 3–4 at §2.1.2.2 and §3.1.1.1).



(*CN* 17, 8–9)

(*CN* 21, 10; 12–13)

These stanzas address precisely the problem of episcopal decision making in relation to the community, pinpointing most of all the problem of slander (*mēkal qarṣē*, *ṭebbā bīšā*, *daggālē*), connected with envy (*ḥsāmā*, *CN* 17, 8, 5–8). Slander is a preoccupation, because it could undermine the bishop's authority if he was smeared or could hijack the bishop's judgement and give rise to strife if one in the congregation was smeared.

189 "Bile was idle by you, / because peace [*šaynā*] dews gently all over you, // Jealousy was quenched by you, / because your love [*ḥubb-āk*] was always burning; // You blunted the sting of envy, / that no one might be smitten from behind, // to the slander [*mēkal qarṣē*] which brings turmoil / you paid no heed, // as you rejoiced in clarity and truth. / **Blessed is he who adorned your limbs!** /// May you give advice among your people, / like Jethro among the Hebrews: // may you go all the way with the one / who advised you to your advantage, // may you shun all the way the one / who advised you otherwise, // and a sign may Rehoboam be for you, / that you may choose advice beneficial // and you may spurn envious advice. / **Blessed is he who advised discernment!**"

190 "To the old commit the word, / to the youth entrust the silence, // for the stranger [*nukrāyā*] who comes unto you / knows you from your order— // namely, who it is that talks first, / and who's second and third, // and if everyone guards his mouth / and if everyone knows his rank, // then they'll call you blessed. / **May our Lord accomplish your designs!**"

191 "If you should hear bad rumours [*ṭebbā bīšā*] / from trustworthy, not lying people, // pour tears and quench / the fire that kindled in the others, // may the discerning [*pārōšē*] pray with you / and proclaim a fast for the educated [*yaddū'ē*], // and may your pen [*dayr-āk*] be in sorrow / for the one that is lost to sin, // that he may turn to repentance. / **Blessed is he who found the lost sheep!** /// You shan't give ear to anyone, / lest you be flooded with deceits [*daggālē*], // you shan't lend your foot to anyone, / lest you be

CN 17, 8 is similar to *CN* 19, 9 in structure and themes: odd-numbered lines describe an avoided danger, while even-numbered ones explain how it was avoided, with the last iteration (7–9) occupying three lines instead of two[192]. Here, similarly to *CN* 19, 9, the bishop is able to avoid negative feelings by way of his meek attitude, promoting "peace" (*šaynā*) and showing "love" (*ḥubbā*) to his parishioners[193]. However, the danger avoided in *CN* 17, 8 is not a loss of authority by the bishop, but "the slander which brings turmoil" (*mēkal qarṣē da-mdawwed*, 7)—namely, a problem of harmony inside the community.

The theme is reprised at *CN* 21, 12, where Ephrem advises caution in receiving "bad rumours" (*ṭebbā bīšā*, *CN* 21, 12, 1), an expression alluding to slanders or allegations that someone had behaved sinfully[194]. In this case, the bishop is advised to verify the source of the information. And even if the source happens to be reliable, Ephrem's advice is to pray for the soul of the sinner and to take on his penance in his stead: tears

led astray by the dissolute, // you shan't give yourself to anyone, / lest you be downtrodden by the bold, // keep your hand from the false, / lest he gather thorns with your hand: // be both removed and present. / **Blessed is he who's near even when he is far!**"

192 Only line 6 deviates from the scheme, presenting the *consequence*, instead of the *cause* of the avoided danger.

193 The connotations of lines 1–4 of the stanza are partially lost in an English translation: Ephrem employs the same metaphor for the danger and its remedy, so that the remedy appears as a kind of retaliation or homoeopathic cure. Thus, "jealousy" (*ṭnānā*) is "quenched" (*d'īkā*)—a verb employed mostly for flames—thanks to the "burning" (*metgawzal*) of "love" (*ḥubbā*, a word coming from root *ḥ-b-b*, "to burn"); "fury" (*ḥemtā*), a word that can also mean "venom" and "inflammation" (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 1299, *s.v.* ܚܡܬܐ; I rendered it with "bile"), is rendered void by peace "dripping" (*rāsem*), a verb connected with dew (*rsāmā*), so that peace can be intended either as the water quenching the "inflammation" of fury or as a beneficial fluid instead of poison. Given this parallelism between 1–2 and 3–4, I suggest correcting the *kaf* affixed to the word *ḥemtā* (1) with an *ālap*. In fact, the reading with *kaf*, namely *ḥemt-āk*, makes no sense: in this context the second-person singular of the affix pronoun *-āk* can only be Bishop Abraham; if the possessive were subjective, meaning "the fury *you have*", then the sentence would contradict line 2, which says that Abraham is completely devoted to peace, and it would also break the parallelism, because it is clear that *ṭnānā* at line 3 can only be jealousy *against* Abraham; but if the pronoun were objective, meaning "the fury *against you*", then it is difficult to explain why Ephrem would have employed the affix here and not in the case of *ṭnānā*, breaking the nice symmetry of these lines and garbling the sense of the clause (because the subjective meaning would seem more obvious grammatically). After all, even though Beck prints the word with the *kaf*, he still refrains from translating it ("Das Zürnen hat bei dir seine Schärfe verloren", Beck 1961b, 56). This section of the poems is transmitted in a single manuscript (Beck's E; see Beck 1961a, 45, *apparatus criticus*); I could not see the manuscript; hence, I cannot be certain of the concrete position of the word in relation to the others on the page; however, it is noteworthy that the first words of the two previous lines (*CN* 13, 7, 9 and 10) both ended with *kaf* and that the word after *ḥemtā*, *lwāt-āk*, ended with *taw-kaf*, all factors that could have contributed to such a slip of the scrivener.

194 *Ṭebbā* means "fame", "rumour". It is used of the reputation of a person notably in the Peshitta translation of Ruth 2:5, where Greek has τίνος ἡ νεᾶνις αὕτη; and Hebrew *lə-mī han-naʿărā haz-z'ot*, whereas Syriac has *mā ṭebb-āh d-'ulaymtā hādē*. The first two give an idea of possession, while the Peshitta is more generic, as if Boaz were asking: "what is known/what does people say about this girl?".

(*demʿē*, 3), prayer (*nebʿōn*, 5), fasting (*ṣawmā*, 6) and a contrite countenance (*b-ḥaššā*, 7) define the exercise of penance, which should bring about the sinner's repentance (*d-netpnē ba-tyābūtā*, 9). There is here the same idea found in Gregory's poem, where he imagined the bishop calling forth the sinner's tears through his own tears: the bishop has the power to take on part of the penance of others and should do so[195]. What is different from Gregory, is Ephrem's mention of other people assisting the bishop in this task, people whom he calls "discerning" (*pārōšē*, 5) and "educated" (*yaddūʿē*, 6) and who should be part of the bishop's "pen" (*dayrā*, 7). Since this last word seems to be used as a synonym for "clergy" at *CN* 17, 3, 3 (see §2.2.1.1), and given what we know of Syrian asceticism in the time of Ephrem (§1.2.1; §3.2.1), it is likely that Ephrem advocates for the sharing of information with the clergy and the educated ascetics (such as he was), so that these might shoulder a part of the burden of the sinner and pray for him, being the spiritual elite of the community. In this context, the bishop seems to act as an "ascetic-in-chief", coordinating the spiritual powers of local ascetics with the spiritual needs of the community and fighting the good fight in the first lines.

However, the fact that Ephrem has to advise this course of action presupposes that alternatives were possible. Indeed, two stanzas adjacent to those concerned with slander (*CN* 17, 9 and *CN* 21, 13) betray the presence of alternative viewpoints: Ephrem exhorts the bishop to be careful in accepting advice, choosing the people around him cautiously. The two stanzas are structurally identical: four propositions with the imperfect in the second person, expressing a wish or advice, occupy the odd-numbered lines, while the even-numbered are occupied by subordinates, negative finals in *CN* 21, 13, and a comparative and two relatives at *CN* 17, 9; as usual, the last proposition is one line longer and, at *CN* 17, 9, a bit different. There is even some correspondence in meaning, because lines 1–2 of each stanza refer to the topic of advice, lines 3–4 to "going" with someone, and lines 5–6 to seeing or avoiding someone, and the last three lines warn against giving credit to slanderers. Even if the sense of lines 1–2 of *CN* 17, 9 and *CN* 21, 13 is the opposite, with the former exhorting to *give* advice, the latter to not *receive* bad advice, the verb is the same: the bishop should "give" (*tettel*) advice and not "give" his ear to bad advice. The expression "lend your foot" in *CN* 21, 13, 3 is a metonymy with the same sense as "go with" at *CN* 17, 9, 3: both echo the biblical metaphor of "walking" as "behaving" and "walking with someone" as "imitating someone's behaviour"[196]. The ideas of "avoiding" (*teʿrūq*) and "not give oneself to" of lines 5–6 of each stanza are also very similar.

The main difference is that *CN* 17, 9 employs two biblical *exempla*, whereas *CN* 21, 13 uses none. The first, positive example is Jethro, Moses's father-in-law and a "priest" (*kumrā*) of the Midianites (Ex. 18:1), who advised the prophet to give laws and delegate

195 Rapp 2005, 72–90, where the theme is abundantly analysed, especially for holy men and ascetics. The relevant scriptural passage is Gal. 6:2.

196 Cf. Gen. 5:24; Lev. 26:27–28; 2Chron. 22:3; Ps. 1:1; 81:12; Prov. 1:15; 4:14; also in Gregory: οὐ μὲν ἐγὼ κείνοισιν [bad bishops] . . . συνοδίτης (II, 1, 13, 203–204).

judging activities to leaders in the populace instead of sitting himself all day in judgement (Ex. 18). The comparison with a priest is apt, but Ephrem paradoxically compares Jethro's counselling "among the Hebrews" (*bēt-ʿebrāyē*) with the bishop's counselling "in his people" (*b-gaw ʿamm-āk*), the former being a foreigner and outsider, the latter a part of the community. It remains meaningful that Jethro's counsel is to delegate juridical power, anticipating *CN* 18, 11. The negative example is Rehoboam: Solomon's heir refused the counsel of elder advisors in favour of younger courtiers, thereby imposing a heavier yoke on the people and bringing about the schism between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, led by the House of David, and the tribes of Israel (1Reg. 12). This story is rich in links with Ephrem's situation: the opposition between elder and younger advisors is played out at *CN* 21, 10; the theme of hard or meek rule was very relevant, as Valgash demonstrated (see §4.2), and, finally, schism was a very present possibility in Ephrem's time. Since these lines are addressed to the bishop, who probably knew his Bible, it is not to be believed that Ephrem's allusions, though not so evident, went unnoticed; on the contrary, they are carefully chosen to anticipate and defend other propositions he is going to advance.

What this repeated theme implies is that the bishop was frequently assisted in his decision making—though it is not clear if the assistance was actively sought by the prelate or was spontaneous—and also that differing pieces of advice were proposed on the same topics, since Ephrem does care to distinguish "beneficial" (*melkē d-ʿudrānā*, *CN* 17, 9, 8) from "envious" (*melkē da-ḥsāmā*, *CN* 17, 9, 9) advice. Indeed, he goes on to thank God for "discernment" (*buyyānā*, *CN* 17, 9, 10) in the same stanza: if there is discernment, there must be differences among which to discern. Which real-life dynamics were addressed by Ephrem's remarks is difficult to see. One tends to think that when Ephrem wishes for discerning advisors to the bishop, he is really trying to gain influence on the bishop for the group of the "discerning" and "educated" (*pārōšē, yaddūʿē*, *CN* 21, 12, 5–6), of which he might have been part. However, this is just a guess, and we cannot infer from the texts the composition and differences of the bishop's advisors: we can only suppose that there were different advisors and that Ephrem endeavoured to be one of them.

To wrap up the theme of influence on the bishop, which in Ephrem takes the form of the contrast between good advice and slander, I mention *CN* 21, 10: here, Ephrem recommends that the new bishop discipline his congregation as regards language, letting only the elder members speak. The poet's formulation preserves echoes of Paul's polemics with the community in Corinth[197]. This stanza shows a very concrete side of the bishop's spiritual leadership: Ephrem calls the bishop to discipline language, preemptively

197 Beck 1961b, 69 correctly points to 1Cor. 14:23 ("If, therefore, the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?") because of the identity of verb between Paul's "come in" (*neʿlōn*) and Ephrem's "who comes to you" (*d-ʿāyel ṣēd-ayk*). The verb is quite generic, but the situations of the two passages are remarkably similar: the theme is the proper order in speaking publicly and the argument brought forth is that the community should behave as if an outsider were present. Interestingly, Paul

selecting the voices to be heard and the "order" (*ṭukkāsā*, 4) in which they should be heard. An interesting detail of this stanza is the reference to "the stranger" (*nukrāyā*, 3) observing the order in the community, and this for two reasons.

The first is the clear witness given by this line to Ephrem's interest in the community's reputation with outsiders, for the word *nukrāyā* is used not only for "stranger" in an ethnic or linguistic sense ("foreign") but also for someone or something *outside* the Christian community or the Christian doctrine; therefore, it could here allude to the reputation enjoyed by Ephrem's community with other communities (pagans, Jews, heretics)[198]. Gregory had the same preoccupation as regards the moral worth of the bishop, while Ephrem employs the argument vis-à-vis the behaviour of the whole community, to stress the bishop's responsibility in disciplining speech. As for Gregory, so for Ephrem the argument serves to counter intra-Christian opposition: in the case of Gregory, having a good reputation among pagans disarmed those who thought that baptism and ordination where enough to completely cleanse a formerly immoral person, while for Ephrem it serves to underpin traditional social hierarchies (such as the superiority of elder people). The basic mechanism is the same: the occasional reminder of the bishop's mission to convert pagans (or at least protect the reputation of the church) made the bishop beholden to an authority of sorts, which was neutral to intra-Christian disputes and bound the bishop to a stricter observance than what might be admitted in a purely Christian context. However, if Gregory's use of the trope was addressed against a relaxed approach to moral scrutiny and the sacraments, Ephrem's insistence on the good order of the community should imply the presence of disorder. Bearing in mind that any inference from these texts to reality has limited validity in the absence of external sources, one could infer from this stanza that there was a group inside the community perceived to be threatening traditional hierarchies. A good fit for this role may be a group of ascetics with a strong charismatic attitude, defying socially accepted norms of speech.

A second reason for interest in lines 3–4 is that the idea of the stranger "coming" to the community and observing its order seems to imply a context of communal deliberation. For, taken by themselves, the remarks on the correct order of speech may be construed as metaphorical: the question would be not who talks first and who is second, but to whom the bishop gives preeminence in his decisions and whom he chooses to neglect. However, the presence of the stranger suggests a concrete situation. Ephrem seems to refer to occasions on which members of the community may have voiced their opinions in the presence of the bishop, who therefore had the task of regulating such assemblies. Again, all of this is highly uncertain in the absence of other sources, but it is worth formulating hypotheses and taking the texts seriously.

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envisages clearly an assembly context for his remark ("If, therefore, the whole church be come together (*tetkannaš*) into one place"). This could be a clue that Ephrem, too, has an assembly context in mind.

198 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2380, *s.v.* ܢܟܪܝܐ.

3.1.4.4 The bishop as teacher of ascetic virtues

Until now, I have examined texts highlighting the *modes* of the bishop's discipline of the community—namely, meekness and discernment in accepting advice. Yet Ephrem addresses also the content of the bishop's disciplinary actions, the virtues he should help his community to develop. His treatment is much more extended than Gregory's, who devoted only one passage to the theme; both groups of poems (*CN* 13–16 and *CN* 17–21) underline always the necessity for the bishop to set an example, but they differ in the specific contents of the bishop's teaching.

Among the poems about Abraham, *CN* 21 is the most detailed as regards moral discipline: it begins with biblical examples of vices overcome (*CN* 21, 1–2), then compares Abraham with those examples (*CN* 21, 3–4). After a stanza reminding the bishop of his duty to lead all categories of the community according to their specific needs (*CN* 21, 5), Ephrem develops in detail the kind of discipline Nisibis's community requires, partly through a reprise of the biblical examples introduced earlier:

3 ܬܚܘܒ ܠܥܘܬܐ ܡܢ ܨܘܡܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܒܨܘܡܗ ܕܕܢܝܐܝܠ
ܬܒܗܬ ܪܓܬܐ ܨܝܕ ܦܓܪܟ ܐܝܟ ܡܐ ܕܒܗܬܬ ܨܝܕ ܝܘܣܦ
ܬܚܘܒ ܡܢܟ ܪܓܬ ܟܣܦܐ ܐܝܟ ܡܐ ܕܚܒܬ ܨܝܕ ܫܡܥܘܢ
ܬܐܣܘܪ ܒܐܪܥܐ ܐܟܘܬܗ ܘܬܫܪܐ ܒܪܘܡܐ ܒܕܡܘܬܗ
ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܝܠܗ ܒܪܝܟ ܕܐܫܠܡ ܠܟ ܬܫܡܫܬܗ[199]
…

6 ܒܡܟܝܟܘܬܟ ܢܬܒܛܠ ܒܪܐ ܫܦܝܐ ܕܒܟܠܬ ܓܢܣܝ
ܒܡܫܝܢܘܬܟ ܢܬܛܠܡ ܒܪܐ ܛܠܝܐ ܕܒܟܠܬ ܟܠܗ
ܒܐܘܝܘܬܟ ܬܘܒ ܢܬܦܝܣ ܫܠܡܐ ܢܚܝܠܐ ܕܩ̈ܦܘܬܢ
ܕܐܣܬܪܘܛܐ ܢܚܘܠܐ ܫܘܒܚܗ ܠܟܠܗ ܡܫܝܚܘܬܢ
ܘܨ ܪܘܚܗ ܡܕܒܪ ܚܕܬܐܝܬ ܒܪܝܟ ܕܒܚܘܪܢ ܨܪܦ ܠܟ

7 ܒܨܘܡܟ ܢܒܗܬ ܡܗܝܡܢܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܡܪܐ ܠܚܣܝܪܘܬܢ
ܢܬܒܛܠ ܡܢ ܟܐܒܐ ܕܐܚܕ ܚܟܡ ܘܚܫܡ ܠܟ
ܒܛܠ ܟ̈ܠܠܬܐ ܕܐܚܝ̈ ܒܢ̈ܝܐ ܕܟܠܗܘܢ ܫܘܦܪܢܐ
ܡܘܬܢ ܒܫܢܬܐ ܒܚܕܐ ܚܡܝ ܠܟܠܬܐ ܒܚܕܐ
ܗܘܝ ܡܪܝ ܟܠܬ ܒܗܕܪܢ ܒܪܝܟ ܕܓܒܟ ܡܛܠ ܣܡ

8 ܒܢ̈ܝܐ ܒܢ̈ܫܐ ܢܬܦܫܡܘܢ ܒܪܬܐ ܢܟܦܬܐ ܠܐ ܬܬܦܢܐ
ܕܬܦܩܘܡ ܬܡܝܗܐ ܪ̈ܘܚܝܬܐ ܘܐܢ ܗܘ ܕܬܦܩܘܡ ܕܘܡܪܐ ܗܘ
ܘܒܢ̈ܬܐ ܠܐ ܢܬܦܪܥܘܢ ܒܦܘܡ ܩܒܪܐ ܣܦܩܐܝܬ
ܒܢܟܦܘܬܐ ܘܐܠܗܐ ܘܡܪܕܘܬܐ ܕܢܣܟܐ ܠܒܫ ܒܬܘܠܘܬܐ
ܘܚܕܪܐ ܟܠܗ ܒܢܟܐ ܒܪܝܟ ܕܠܒܢ ܡܚܦܝ ܠܟ

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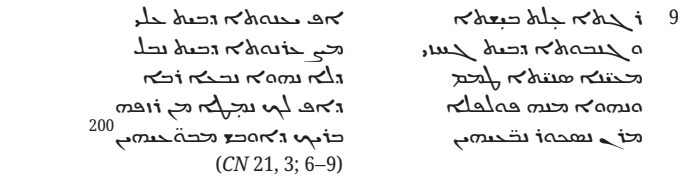
[199] "May gluttony succumb to your fasting, / as with the fasting of Daniel; // May lust be ashamed before your body, / as when it was ashamed before Joseph; // May greed succumb to you, / as when it succumbed before Simon; // you can bind on earth like him, / and you can loose on high in his manner, // since your faith is like his. / **Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry!**"



(*CN* 21, 3; 6–9)

These stanzas are organised in a chiastic structure, with the first and last (6 and 9) reprising biblical examples already introduced and exhorting the bishop to remedy the different vices they represent, while the two stanzas in the middle (7–8) focus on the particular vice the bishop should address.

Stanza 6 has a parallel in stanza 3, because they share a similar structure and the same theme, the bishop's victory over vices. Both stanzas are divided into two parts: lines 1–6 present three imperfect verbs wishing for the uprooting of a vice (in the odd-numbered lines, built in parallel in both stanzas) and three biblical examples related to the vice in question (positive examples in stanza 3, negative ones in stanza 6). The last examples are each expanded, and they occupy the remaining lines (7–9), according to Behagel's law of increasing terms[201]. It is also significant that in stanza 3 the last positive example is Simon Peter, praised for his refusal to sell the Spirit to Simon Magus (Act. 8:20), while in stanza 6 the last negative example is Judas Iscariot, who sold Jesus. It is clear that Peter and Judas form a contrasting diptych, signalling the parallel between stanzas 3 and 6. From the point of view of meaning, both stanzas underline that the overcoming of vices in the community is due to the personal virtue of the bishop: it is by exercising virtue that the bishop teaches virtue: lines 1, 3, and 5 of stanza 3 wish for the uprooting of vices "from" (*men*) a virtue of the bishop: "from your fasting" (*men ṣawm-āk*), "from your body" (*men pagr-āk*), and "from you" (*menn-āk*). The principle is the same at lines 1, 3, and 5 of stanza 6, though here the preposition is "with", "through" (*b-*).

200 "Through your poverty may / the heinous habit [*ʿyādā*] of the likes of Gehazi end, // through your chastity may / the impure habit [*ʿyādā*] of the likes of Eli cease, // through your harmony may / the false peace coming from the lips // of the false Iscariot fade. / Remould all over our thoughts, // fashion them from top anew. / **Blessed is he who in your crucible refines us!** /// In your tenure may Mammon be ashamed, / who was master of our freedom, // may fade from us the illness, / to which we were accustomed [*ʾaʿīd*] and consenting: // destroy the causes that preserve / our customs [*ʿyādē*] full of detriment! // Wickedness acquired us [*qnāt-an*] by habit [*ba-ʿyādā*], / may goodness acquire us [*teqnē-n*] by habit [*ba-ʿyādā*]: // be, Excellence, the cause of our relief! / **Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!** /// May bad habits [*ʿyādē*] be interrupted, / may the church not acquire wealth, // that she may be able to acquire souls, / and if she is able to do this, 'tis a wonder! // Let not the departed be buried, / cutting off hope, as heathens do, // amidst clothes, wails, and mourning, / when the living wears a tunic, // and the departed a whole trunk of clothes. / **Blessed is he who made us return to our dust!** /// Lust is the cause of wickedness, / together with the gluttony of the likes of Eli // and the thievery of the likes of Gehazi / and the insolence of the likes of Nabal. // Block these heinous fountains, / lest they flow abundantly, // and filth come from them, / which might reach with its blurs even you: // aye, Our Lord, shut their flow! / **Blessed is he who dried their sources!**"

201 See Best 2007, 82.

Stanza 9 reprises the theme, but in a different manner. It reprises the examples of Gehazi and the sons of Eli, symbolizing, respectively, greed and the double vices of gluttony and lust. In this case, Ephrem envisages the opposite process, where it is not the bishop's morality elevating the morality of the community, but the community's immorality that can infect the bishop. The stanza serves as a stern warning after Ephrem has explained in the two previous stanzas what the bishop should do. Taking together stanzas 3, 6, and 9, we have three different lists of vices: gluttony, lust, and greed (stanza 3), greed, lust, and lies (stanza 6), lust, gluttony, greed (i.e., "thievery"), and insolence (stanza 9). That lust should enjoy such a prominence is no surprise, since the weight of Encratite tendencies in Syriac Christianity is generally known to modern scholarship[202]. Gluttony can be linked to the special importance that Ephrem (and, presumably, his community) conferred on fasting[203]. The other item appearing in all lists is greed: its prominence aptly frames stanzas 7 and 8, which deal with facets of this vice.

Regarding the biblical examples employed, it is worth noting Ephrem's moralizing reading of the biblical narrative, attributing merits and sins on the basis of an ascetic moral code. One would be justified in reading Peter's and Judas's behaviour as expressions of a moral success or failure in resisting a passion: Peter refuses to sell the Spirit to Simon Magus, and in this sense he resisted greed. Nabal and Gehazi are clearly characterised by the biblical text as morally reprehensible: Nabal is repeatedly qualified as insolent, unmannered, and violent (1Sam. 25:3; 25); Gehazi's vice is clearly avarice (2Reg. 5:20–27). By contrast, the ascetic reading of Daniel and Joseph—though traditional—is partial, while Ephrem's interpretation of the trespass of the sons of Eli egregiously oversteps the logic of the biblical text. Joseph's reasons for declining the advances of Potiphar's wife are given at Gen. 39:9: he refers to abuse his master's trust, to violate the rights of the husband over his wife, and, finally and generically, to commit a "great sin against God". Daniel refuses the Babylonian king's food "so as not to defile himself" (Dan. 1:8), a clause interpreted as referring either to the rules of *Kashrut* or to the fact that the meat served for the king could have been sacrificed to the idols[204]: in one case we would have a ritual obligation; in the other the rejection of idolatry; and, in both cases, the undertone would be of Jewish particularism in the face of a gentile power; gluttony and fasting are by no means at the forefront of the passage. However, it must be noted that the Peshitta formulation of Dan. 1:8 elides the reference to defilement, leaving more space for a moralistic interpretation. The transgressions of the sons of Eli are narrated at 1Sam. 2:12–17 (eating the fat part of offerings, which was destined to God) and 22 (lying with temple servants). It is true that 1Sam. 2:12 describes the character of Eli's sons negatively, but their transgressions are primarily transgres-

202 See, for example, Vööbus 1958, 69–73.

203 Vööbus 1958, 84–85; see the cycle of poems Ephrem devoted to fasting (Beck's *De ieiunio*).

204 Merrill Willis 2018, 1251.

sions against God, because they disrespected the ritual orders and purity God required (1Sam. 2:12–13; 17; 25). Gregory employs their example in one of our poems:

> Ὣς δὲ καὶ Ἠλείδῃσιν ἐπέχραε λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος,
> Ἠλείδαις, ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον. Ἦ γὰρ ἔβαλλον
> Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας ἱερῶν καθύπερθε λεβήτων. (130)
> Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ' Ἠλεὶ χόλον ἔκφυγεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν
> Οὐχ ὁσίη γαστὴρ παίδων ἐχάλεψε δίκαιον,
> Καί περ ἀεὶ βρίσαντα ὀνειδείοις ἐπέεσσιν.
> (II, 1, 13, 128–133)

> Thus even the Helids seized a baneful fate,
> the sons of Heli, for their greedy mind. Yea, they'd lay
> unholy hands on the holy kettles. (130)
> Nor did Heli escape the wrath, but even him
> the ungodly belly of his sons vexed, though he was righteous
> and laden with words of rebuke for them.

Gregory's version clearly states the ritualistic nature of the transgression of Eli's sons (Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας, 130; Οὐχ ὁσίη γαστὴρ, 132), which is the point of his comparing them with unworthy people being elected bishops; but he, like Ephrem, attributes gluttony to them as a motive (ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον, 129; Οὐχ ὁσίη γαστὴρ, 132; and see Ephrem, *Jul. Saba* 23, 19).

Stanza 7 clarifies that greed is the main problem of Ephrem's community. Two different metaphors are woven together in this text: on one side, greed, personified as the god Mammon, has captured the Nisibenes and keeps them enslaved (1–2; 7–8), so that the bishop should buy them back from the evil deity; on the other, greed is described as an illness (*kēbā*, 3), whose causes the bishop should cure (5). The stanza also bridges the previous and the next one, which develops the theme of "habit" (*ʿyādā*). In stanza 6 two vices (greed and lust) had already been qualified as "habits" (2; 4), but stanza 7 extensively develops this idea and explains that greed, though an illness, still plagues the community because of habit, which has made the vice even pleasurable (4). However, this habit remains detrimental (6). What is interesting is that the remedy for bad habit is good habits (7–8), in a mutual relationship, which Ephrem describes with the metaphor of commerce. The meaning of the metaphor is that bad habits cannot be simply lost, but must instead be exchanged for good ones, and that the passage from bad to good habits is gradual and proportional—that is, the more one progresses in virtue, the more one loses in vice. Yet if only habit can overcome habit, then the way to virtue, on which the bishop must lead the community, is a way of training and exercise—also known as ascesis[205].

205 The conceptualisation of vice as a habit remaining even after purification is employed also by Gregory: see §3.3.2.1. In both cases, it stems from Aristotle's description of virtues and vices as habits that provide virtuous or wicked actions of pleasure or pain, description found at Aristot. *eth. Nic.* 1104a-b.

Stanza 8 addresses two concrete points in which greed should be overcome. First, the church should be poorer, privileging spiritual gains over earthly ones (1–4). Even if the argument seems a case of generic moralism, given Ephrem's insistence on greed in this poem, something else may be at play. It seems reasonable to link the theme of greed in these first stanzas—and especially the remark on the riches of the church in stanza 8—with stanzas 14–15: there, Ephrem expresses the hope that the new emperor (Jovian) will put an end to the "greedy" (*ya'nē*, *CN* 21, 14, 5). These stanzas allude to plundering (*CN* 21, 14, 3–4) and thefts (*CN* 21, 15, 5–9) in the recent past, likely during Julian's time, and Ephrem believes these will end with Jovian. In stanzas 16–17, the poet explains why persecution under Julian was beneficial and why the new era of peace and authority for the church is more detrimental than persecution. In this context, lines 1–4 of stanza 8 might be read as part of Ephrem's admonitions against a "relaxed" peace, "the false peace [*šlāmā nkīlā*] coming from the lips / of the false Iscariot" (*CN* 21, 6, 6–7). The theme of false peace, or "ungrateful" peace, is prominent in the *Carmina Nisibena* proper (*CN* 1–21): Ephrem developed the theme originally in reference to the Persian sieges, but here it is repurposed for the end of Julian's persecution. The idea is that hard times make for better Christians, while in good times the community shows itself disloyal to the vows made to God in the time of trial[206]. Therefore, Ephrem admonishes the church not to slip into the greedy abuses perpetrated by her enemies during Julian's reign. It is interesting to note that this ambivalent sentiment vis-à-vis persecution, with its ramifications in the desire for a church disengaged from mundane logic, is one of the building blocks of fourth-century monasticism[207].

The remaining lines of stanza 8 (5–9) deplore excess and luxury during funerals. The immediate model of the passage is 1Thess. 4:13, stigmatizing excessive mourning as un-Christian, specifically because it shows a lack of hope in the resurrection[208]. However, whereas Paul mentions only lamentations among the excessive customs, Ephrem stresses expenditures and luxuries devoted to the dead. This may make us think of the competition between families and the problem of ostentation in ancient cities[209], but instead of these traditional motives for antiluxury polemic, Ephrem puts forth a characteristically Christian one: dissipation for funerals jarringly contradicts the Christian's duty to help the poor, because, paradoxically, "the living wears a tunic,

206 See *CN* 2, 7–9; 14; *CN* 3, 5–6; 8–12; *CN* 4, 13–14; *CN* 5, 15; 17–18; *CN* 6, 10; *CN* 7, 1; 7, 8; *CN* 9, 16; *CN* 10, 17–18; *CN* 11, 9–10; 19; *CN* 13, 16, 5–6; §4.1.2.

207 For a critical collection of ancient texts (Greek and Latin) on the topic see Malone 1950. Vööbus 1958, 88–90 refers to military imagery in early Syriac asceticism, but the theme of martyrdom is conspicuously absent. See also below, §3.2.

208 "As the others, who have no hope (*d-sabrā layt l-hōn*)" (1Thess. 4:13); "cutting off hope (*ba-psāq sabrā*), as heathens do" (*CN* 21, 8, 6). Note Ephrem's metaphorical rewriting through *psāqā* "cut, incision" of Paul's plain phrase.

209 For luxury and sumptuary laws in Archaic Greece: Van Wees 2018; in ancient Rome, cf. the *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome, Antiquité* 128.1, 2016. For legal limits to ostentation during funerals in Greece: Hauser/Kierdorf 2006.

/ and the departed a whole trunk of clothes" (*CN* 21, 8, 8–9). Ephrem's formulation implies, though not explicitly, that it is the bishop's duty to make sure such displays do not happen. In this regard, the bishop acts almost as an old Roman censor, although with dissimilar motivations.

The bishop's main instrument in amending his parishioners' ways is his own example, and *CN* 21 has already made this very clear. The idea had been employed in the poems on Valgash, too, and with much more insistence, as it constituted an essential part of Ephrem's argument defending the bishop from criticism:

3 ܚܙܝ ܕܐ ܕܥܝܢ ܕܚܝ
ܡܫܬܝܢ ܫܟܝܡܘܬܐ
ܕܫܠܡ ܡܫܬܚܝܢ

4 ܡܢ ܟܠܚ ܕܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܚܝ ܡܢ
ܡܫܬܟܚܬ ܫܘܒܥܐ ܕܥܦ ܚܠ ܚܠ[210]
ܡܫܬܟܚܬ ܕܫܘܒܥܐ ܕܥܦ ܚܠ ܚܠ
(*CN* 15, 3–4)

ܡܫܬܟܚ ܠܝ ܡܢ ܚܠ ܚܠ ܡܫܬܟܚ
ܡܫܬܟܚ ܫܠܝܛ ܒܟܠ ܡܢ ܒܗ[211]
ܡܫܬܟܚ ܫܠܝܛ ܒܟܠ ܡܢ ܒܗ
(*CN* 16, 20)

These stanzas, two of which open Ephrem's defence of Valgash, while the third closes it in the following poem, posit a link between the bishop's personal conduct and the community, either exhorting the faithful to imitate the bishop (*CN* 15, 3-4) or stating the aptness of the bishop's gift to the characters of the congregation (*CN* 16, 20). The rhetorical function of such expressions—like that of the metaphor of the mirror (§2.2.3)—is to exonerate the bishop from the moral failings of his community, highlighting the role of the faithful in trying to imitate the leader. Through this construct, each instance of praise for the bishop exacerbates the blame on the community, who could not imitate such an outstanding example.

However, I am not treating these stanzas here for the mode of teaching, but for the content, and these texts are in fact a carefully constructed list of virtues, marked out by the reprise-with-variations in *CN* 16, 20 of the items in *CN* 15, 3: the binomial "stillness" (*šalyūtā*)-"serenity" (*šapyūtā*) (*CN* 15, 3, 2) becomes "humility" (*makkīkūtā*)-"stillness" (*šalyūtā*) (*CN* 16, 20, 3); the "kindliness" (*bassīmūtā*) and "meekness" (*nīḥūtā*) of *CN* 15, 3,

210 "O limbs, imitate the head: / acquire stillness [*šalyūtā*] in his serenity [*šapyūt-eh*], // and kindliness [*bassīmūtā*] in his meekness [*nīḥūt-eh*], / in his holiness [*qaddīšūt-eh*] splendour [*zahyūtā*], // and in his wisdom [*ḥekmt-eh*] instruction [*yullpānā*]. /// Acquire discretion [*ṭa'mā*] in his modesty [*rmīsūt-eh*] / and sobriety [*nakpūtā*] in his seriousness [*yaqqīrūt-eh*], // and solitude [*šūḥādā*] in his poverty [*meskēnūt-eh*]: / because he is fair all in all, // may we all be made fair by all of him.

211 "Here is his nourishment for my adulthood, / his exegeses for my discernment, // his humility [*makkīkūt-eh*] for my stillness [*šalyut-*(*y*)], / his kindliness [*bassīmūt-eh*] for my meekness [*nīḥūt-*(*y*)], // his seriousness [*yaqqīrūt-eh*] for my sobriety [*nakpūt-*(*y*)]!"

3 are inverted at *CN* 16, 20, 4 between bishop and community; "seriousness" (*yaqqīrūtā*) and "sobriety" (*nakpūtā*) from *CN* 15, 4, 2 are reprised identically at *CN* 16, 20, 5. The shared nature of these virtues is their ascetic origin and outlook.

Ephrem mentions two of the three fundamental virtues of the Syriac ascetic, "chastity" (*qaddīšūtā*, *zahyūtā*, and *nakpūtā*) and "poverty" (*meskēnūtā*); with the addition of sobriety in eating, we would have the three virtues contrary to the vices of *CN* 21 (lust, greed, and gluttony), but, although Syriac Christianity deemed fasting very important, even *CN* 21 gave more importance to lust and greed than gluttony[212]. In addition to these fundamental virtues, others are associated with ascetics. The most important is "solitude" (*šūḥādā*), a word derived from the root *y-ḥ-d*, which gives the keyword of Syrian monasticism, *īḥīdāyā*, meaning "solitary", "anchorite"[213]. Comparing this list of virtues with the poems transmitted under Ephrem's name and dedicated to the anchorites Abraham Kidunaia and Julian Saba, we find even more analogies: not only solitude (*CN* 15, 4, 3 and *Iul. Saba* 2, 13, 2; *Iul. Saba* 23, 22) and chastity (*CN* 15, 3, 4; 4, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 15, 2; 23, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 15, 5; 16, 2; *Iul. Saba* 23, 24, 2) are associated with the ascetics' lives, but also wisdom (*ḥekmtā*, *CN* 15, 3, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 26, 4; 30, 4; *Iul. Saba* 15, 1, 2; refrain), instruction (*yullpānā*, *CN* 15, 3, 5 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 7, 1; 11, 3), discretion (*ṭa'mā*, *CN* 15, 4, 1 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 15, 4), seriousness (*yaqqīrūtā*, *CN* 15, 4, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 5 and *Iul. Saba* 15, 3, 1), humility (*makkīkūtā*, *CN* 16, 20, 3 and *Iul. Saba* 2, 13, 5; 15, 3; the whole *Iul. Saba* 11; *Iul. Saba* 23, 24, 1), and the almost untranslatable virtue of *šapyūtā* (*CN* 15, 3, 2 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 23, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 16, 5)[214]. Even mildness, or meekness (*bassīmūtā*), a virtue so characteristically episcopal, is shared with ascetics (*CN* 15, 3, 3; *CN* 16, 20, 4 and *Abr. Kid.* 8, 10, 3; *Iul. Saba* 2, 15, 4; 16, 3; *Iul. Saba* 15, 3, 2; *Iul. Saba*

212 Vööbus 1958, 84–86, on the importance of fasting and poverty. Aphrahat too stresses the importance of fasting for the ascetic at *dem.* 6, 1 ("let him prepare as offerings for the King desirable fruits, fast and prayer"); 8 ("let him be diligent in fast and in prayer").

213 On the importance of this word see Griffith 1993.

214 Referred to a surface, the adjective *špē* means "plain", "smooth", "flat"; for a liquid, it means "pure", "limpid", "clear" both because "unmixed" and because it has not been stirred; therefore, it is "calm", "peaceful". Metaphorically, the term is employed of human character, and it can denote a "clear" mind, as antonym of "confused", "muddied"; it can denote a "peaceful", "calm" character; it can denote "simplicity" or "sincerity"—that is, absence of deceit and doublethink (see Payne Smith 1879–1901, 4258–4259, 4261–4262, *s.vv.* ܫܦܝܐ .ܫܦܝ). Here, I have brought together only passages with words of the same root, but one could multiply the examples taking also synonyms into account (which are the backbone of Ephrem's poetry), as, for example, the root *p-š-ṭ*, meaning "simplicity" and recurring frequently in the poems on the two hermits; or *šalyūtā* (*CN* 15, 3, 2; *CN* 16, 20, 3), meaning "quiet", "silence", which corresponds to the word *šetqā* "silence" (see, for example, *Abr. Kid.* 8, 1, 1).

23, 24, 3)[215]. Finally, the chain of biblical examples Ephrem used at *CN* 21 to explain the bishop's moral activity is repeated for Julian Saba (*Iul. Saba* 23, 19, 2–4)[216].

In sum, the content of the bishop's moral teaching should consist, according to Ephrem, mostly of ascetic virtues, which he must teach first and foremost through his personal example. Among the preoccupations of the poet, two have the most importance: greed and the fight for the attention of the bishop. Both problems have the potential to escalate and endanger the community, since greed may arouse grudges in non-Christians or envy internally, whereas if a liar or a slanderer had the bishop's ear at his disposal, he could deal heavy damages to the concord of the community.

3.1.5 Conclusion

The Ephremian overlapping of ascetic and episcopal virtues leads us naturally to the next theme—namely, the relationship between bishops and asceticism, especially those monastic experiences which became a force to be reckoned with in the fourth century. But before treating this new theme, it is worthwhile to review the general lines of the survey on episcopal leadership first, then to offer a synthetic picture of the bishops as characters, as they emerge from these poems.

Episcopal leadership is the fundamental theme of our poems, their raison d'être: at the basis of the effort to put the bishops in poetry lies the conviction that moulding the bishops means moulding the destiny of the church, since the bishops are entrusted with ecclesiastical leadership. Therefore, this is the main facet of their ministry that concerns our poems. Gregory expresses this interest explicitly, developing a historical analysis of the church: the times of the apostles have passed, and church leaders cannot be simpleminded anymore, because theological disputes and moral decline threaten the faith and require specialised treatment. Therefore, bishops should possess a theological formation, enabling them to teach orthodoxy and dispel heresy. Gregory spends much time defining this formation, which has an ambiguous relationship with pagan philosophy and draws mostly from the example of Origen. On the other side, moral decline requires a stern change of direction, in that bishops should be chosen carefully and after they proved themselves morally worthy. Actually, Gregory does not devote much attention to the kind of moral discipline the bishops should enforce: in a single passage,

215 These features, more linked with an ascetic attitude than with an ascetic practice, are also stressed by Aphrahat in his exhortation to ascetics: "let us be humble [*makkīkē*] and calm [*rmīsē*]" (Aphr. *dem.* 6, 1); "let him [the ascetic] be humble [*makkīkē*] and calm [*rmīsē*] and intelligent [*mhawwan*] and let his word be peaceful [*nyāḥā*] and sweet [*bassīmā*] and let his mind be sincere [*špē*] with everyone" (8).
216 "Like Joseph you did triumph [*neṣḥat*] even unto your youth / the rust of Giezi did not touch you / the filth of the sons of Eli did not adhere to you" (*Iul. Saba* 23, 19, 2–4). Joseph is mentioned as an example of chastity (see *CN* 21, 3, 3–4), Gehazi represents greed (see *CN* 21, 6, 1–2; 9, 3) and the sons of Eli gluttony (see *CN* 21, 9, 2).

he lists the vices the bishop should fight against and requires a merciful approach to penitence. Mercy and meekness, which feature so frequently in contemporary and previous writings on the bishop, especially in connection to the administration of penance, are conspicuously absent in Gregory.

Ephrem lacks Gregory's historical analysis and differs on some crucial points. From the doctrinal point of view, he too believes that the bishop should be the guarantor of the orthodoxy and unity of the congregation, and he makes a big deal of the defence of orthodoxy—although he is much vaguer than Gregory on the concrete points of doctrine that should be addressed. However, the Ephremian bishop has an ambiguous relationship with teaching: good teaching is appreciated as a personal quality and when the congregation is ready to receive it (as in the case of Valgash), but intellectual preparation is by no means as important for Ephrem as for Gregory; indeed the bishop may want to delegate this task to other people, such as deacons like Ephrem, and he would be wholly right in doing so. Conversely, great effort is given to defining the moral tasks of the bishop. Here, three points are to be particularly remarked: one in analogy with Gregory, one in contrast, and a third partly analogous. On the point of moral leadership, Gregory and Ephrem are absolutely in agreement on the idea that the bishop should lead first and foremost by example; therefore, he should be an outstanding moral character. Partly, this idea comes out of their need to defend or attack the real bishops they speak of, because leadership by example lends credibility and relevance to ad hominem attacks (or defences). For Gregory, this idea, combined with the requirement of theological formation, disqualifies both Maximus and Nectarius and obliquely presents Gregory himself as the model bishop. For Ephrem, it ensures that the blame of moral failures in the community is all charged on the community, incapable of following the bishop's example. Gregory and Ephrem are dissimilar in the important space Ephrem gives to episcopal mercy (or meekness, mildness). The Syriac poet does not link it to penance, because for him it has a much wider role to play: mercy—as opposed to justice and discipline—is the binding force of the supernatural order; as such, it characterises the ecclesial community vis-à-vis the state (the Roman Empire), the mature congregation, which has progressed from its beginnings, the church coming after the carnal Israel. Therefore, mercy should be the rationale of the bishop's actions, a concept particularly developed as regards rumours and advice in the community. Ephrem's bishop—differently from Gregory's—seems always encircled by people reporting rumours and advising certain kinds of conduct; hence the poet sees it as necessary to admonish the bishop to be careful in discerning good and bad rumours, useful and evil advice. Mercy should guide him in this. Finally, Ephrem is clearly persuaded that, since the bishop has to teach by example, he should adopt an ascetic lifestyle. As we shall see presently, Gregory too is persuaded that the bishop should be an ascetic, even though the transmission of an ascetic lifestyle to the rest of the congregation is less apparent in the Greek poet.

Until now I have reviewed the doctrinal implications of Gregory's and Ephrem's poems. Yet at the beginning I underlined the literary nature of the categories of "liturgy," "teaching," and "charity": one could ask oneself what kind of literary charac-

ters the bishops in Ephrem's and Gregory's poems are. It has already been highlighted how these categories come from the Christian traditions in which Ephrem and Gregory operate, whether as the fruit of theological reflection or as literary commonplaces and imagery (especially from the Bible).

In the case of Gregory, the distinction between theology and literature is more difficult to draw, because the poet describes either the ideal bishop or bad bishops: bad bishops will be examined separately (§5.2), but the description of the ideal bishop tends inevitably to become a reflection on the office of bishop per se. The only filter between the generic model of bishop and Gregory's ideal bishop is Gregory's own experience, in the sense that the portrait of the ideal bishop is consciously Gregory's self-portrait. Yet this in a certain sense is an unfiltering filter, because Gregory's aim is precisely to present himself as the ideal bishop, so that deviation from the theological model and individualisation are in no way desirable. In this context, Gregory's construction of an ideal bishop and his construction of a poetic self-portrait are one and the same thing, and distinguishing when the theological ideal influences the autobiography and when autobiography influences the theological ideal is almost impossible (see §5.1). In any case, the bishop of his poetry is most of all a teacher of virtue and a priestly mediator between God and mankind, very similar to the late antique philosopher, uniting theurgy, asceticism, scholarly effort, and public engagement, albeit as an outsider to the society he aims to mould.

A similar phenomenon is apparent in Ephrem's *CN* 17–21, where the new bishop, Abraham, is flooded with the whole range of advice and ideal representations of the bishop that tradition put at Ephrem's disposal. What is said of Abraham here could be said of any good bishop. The only really personal element to Abraham is his young age, which, however, is irrelevant to the present categories of liturgy, teaching, and charity. *CN* 13–16 are totally different: first of all, because they are concerned with three different bishops who were mostly good but also well known by Ephrem's public, which meant that he could simply superimpose an abstract model on their personalities; second, because Ephrem was not a bishop and was not trying to present one particular bishop as *the* ideal bishop, as Gregory does. Therefore, in these poems we see Ephrem engaging with the traditional features of an ideal bishop in order to build three different characters, Jacob, Babu, and Valgash. Babu, who is the least important for the poet, is characterised as the typical charitable bishop, engaged in material relief for the poor and for war prisoners. Jacob emerges as a forceful character, a charismatic yet stern leader for the community, the figure of a founding father. Finally, Valgash is the one we can see most clearly: scholarly and ascetic, a very good public speaker, he seems to have a sweet and merciful character. Ephrem assigns different ideal traits to different bishops in order to represent their individuality to the community: this is a chiefly literary mechanism, which serves—as we will see at §4.1—pragmatic aims, too.

3.2 Bishops and ascetics

There is no doubt that ascetics were one of the most important forces the ecclesiastical hierarchy had to reckon with in the fourth century. The vulgate story goes like this: After Constantine's conversion, the church became more and more entangled with the world, because of imperial support and the number of new converts. The end of persecutions spelled also the end of the church as a spiritual elite detached from society because ready to die for the faith. In reaction to this perceived decadence, individual Christians of Egypt seceded from society and went to live in the desert, undertaking a life of harsh renunciation, a daily martyrdom to replace the literal martyrdom of the Christians of old. Since these Christians lived alone, they were called "monks" (from Gr. μοναχός). Later in the fourth century, besides the lonely life of the anchorites, there developed also the communitarian life of the coenobites: traditionally, Anthony the Great was held to be the first anchorite monk, and Pachomius the initiator of coenobitism. A common trait of these monks would have been their indifference, sometimes even their disdain, towards the secular clergy, seen as too entangled in the life of this world. But the suspicion was mutual: the ecclesiastical hierarchy would not accept the autonomy and independent charisma of these monks, since it threatened the hierarchy's hold on the Christian community. Therefore, a variety of conflicts, solutions, and models of coexistence developed, as witnessed, for example, by Athanasius, Basil, and, later on, Cassiodorus, Benedict of Nursia, and Gregory the Great[217]. The conflict between secular clergy and monks would be one of the essential lenses through which to interpret the history of the church in the passage between antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Though not utterly false, this traditional image is partial and incomplete. The scholarship of at least the last fifty years has shown that many points should be corrected or expanded. This has been done along two main lines: scholars have highlighted geographic differences against the Egyptian bias of the common notions, and the importance of Constantine has been somewhat downplayed. Nowadays, the development of Christian asceticism is seen more as a continuum, beginning before the end of the persecutions[218]. Monks and clergy are not seen as two monolithic ranks; rather, we know that a variety of ascetic models as well as many different approaches of the clergy to ascetics existed. Local traditions played a role, with Syria and Mesopotamia having a place of their own beside Egypt as creative spawning ground of holy men and ascetic

217 Paradigmatic of this traditional reconstruction is chapter 37 of Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* On ascesis substituting martyrdom: Malone 1950; on the trope of the monk refusing ordination: Sterk 2004, 2–3.

218 This is clear for the Syro-Mesopotamian asceticism described by Vööbus 1958; as regards Egyptian asceticism, the pre-Constantinian *apotaktikoi* have been described and highlighted by Goehring 1999; moreover, Egyptian monasticism—and the entire life of the church for that matter—was to be deeply influenced by the works and thought of Origen, in which there is already an ascetic ideology (see Völker 1931). Finally, an overview of asceticism from the New Testament to Augustine is given by Brown 2008.

models: more than just the Anthonian anchorite and Pachomian coenobite, we better appreciate stylites, vagrant ascetics, extravagant penitents, episcopal circles of ascetics, chaste marriages, educated virgins, aristocratic renunciants, and holy bishops as different, often polemically opposed, models of sanctity[219]. For this reason, even the name of "monk" is too reductive, and I prefer to use the label "ascetic", so as not to suggest a priori an Egyptian influence for our texts[220]. What remains true of the traditional image is that the secular clergy had to come to terms with these different experiences and that the relationship between the developing asceticism and the hierarchy is one of the defining features of late antique Christianity. This does not imply that the relationship was always one of disdain and suspicion, but rather that different attitudes—both from ascetics and from clergymen—developed, and in many cases the same individual could conciliate both categories. Our very texts offer abundant information on this aspect, which forms one of the central themes for both poets.

The relationship between the bishop and other ascetics is treated only in passing, but it is interesting that both poets presume it to be one of the tasks of the bishop to lead ascetics. Ephrem, perhaps exaggerating, says that the "flock" (*marʿītā*) entrusted from Valgash to his successor Abraham is composed of the fourth and third part of "saints" (*qaddīšā*), a word concretely meaning "virgin" or "celibate"[221]. From two stanzas it is clear that, in Ephrem's view, the bishop was responsible of the conduct of these celibates, who are also called "virgins" (*btūlē* and *btūlātā*) and "chaste" (*nakpātā*)[222]. This dependence on the bishop is clarified by a line in one of these stanzas, in which the bishop is called to make "the covenant" (*qyāmā*) to shine (*CN* 21, 5, 8), because this reference to a *qyāmā* in relation to ascetics clearly alludes to the institution of the *bnay qyāmā.* The

219 Beside Vööbus 1958, Goehring 1999 and Brown 2008, one may consult Brown 1971b and Brock 1973 (for the extravagant streak of Syrian asceticism); Sterk 2004 (for the relationship between bishop and ascetics, and in part. 20–25 for Syro-Mesopotamian asceticism and the passage from urban ascetics to extravagant asceticism and 25–32, 41–43 for asceticism in Asia Minor, in particular the model of Eustathius of Sebaste); Griffith 1995 (on Syriac urban ascetics); Harvey 1993 and Harvey 2005 (for the educated and ascetic women of Syria); Giardina 1994 (for Roman aristocratic women); Gautier 2002, again Sterk 2004, Rapp 2005 (for holy bishops).

220 See Griffith 1995, 237–238.

221 "Moses committed to Joshua // a sheepfold whose half was wolves, / whereas to you a flock was entrusted // whose third and fourth part is consecrated [*qaddīšā*]. / **Blessed is he who adorned your flock**!" (*CN* 19, 6, 6–10). Beck 1961b, 62n15; cf. Payne Smith 1879–1901, 3501, *s.v.* ܩܕܫ.

222 "Here is your flock, oh blessed, / rise and tend it, oh diligent! // Jacob ordered the sheepfolds, / you order these speaking sheep, // make the chaste [*btūlē*] shine purely [*zahhē dakyāʾīt*], / the virgins [*btūlātā*] modestly [*nakpāʾīt*], // establish the priests in splendour, / the powerful in humility, // and the people in righteousness. / **Blessed is he who filled you with understanding**!" (*CN* 19, 3); "Be thou a crown for priesthood/ and through you be glorified the worship, // be thou a brother for the priests, / a chief for the deacons, too, // be thou a master for the infancy, / a staff and help for old age, // be thou a bulwark for the virgins [*nakpātā*], / may the covenant [*qyāmā*] in your tenure be splendid [*netnaṣṣaḥ*], // and the church by your beauty adorned. / **Blessed is he who chose you to be a priest**!" (*CN* 21, 5). For these terms: Vööbus 1958, 103–106.

"sons (or daughters) of the covenant" differed from Egyptian and later Syrian ascetics in that they did not forsake the city to live in the uncivilised space of the heath or the desert; on the contrary, these Christians took up vows of virginity (and likely poverty) during their baptism and, remaining in the city, served the Christian congregation as deacons or catechists, which meant that they were beholden to their bishop[223].

Ephrem mentions the bishop's duty towards ascetics in the context of his description of the bishop's duties to the congregation, in which he carefully distinguishes different categories of members to stress the different approaches a bishop should adopt in order to help each kind of member become the best possible Christian. Interestingly, he distinguishes different categories in the community only in the poems on Abraham (*CN* 17–21), whereas in the poems on Valgash—except for a reference to ascetics in *CN* 13, 21 (see §4.3)—he presents the community almost as a monolith. This reflects two different rhetorical strategies: in *CN* 17–21 Ephrem wants to present/advise the model of a bishop, an abstract figure encompassing all desirable characteristics of a bishop and engaging every possible task of a bishop, because Abraham, having just been elected, does not yet have a particular profile or personality; he is pure potential. With Valgash (*CN* 13–16), instead, Ephrem has to take into account the individual gifts and shortcomings of an experienced bishop, and, most of all, he has to defend him before the community. Moreover, avoiding distinction inside the community is in keeping with Ephrem's strategy for solving its internal conflict (§4.2).

Gregory seems to reference a similar duty to lead ascetics, but his motivations are completely different. Having forcefully presented the argument against the ordination of neophytes because of their lack of preparation (II, 1, 12, 541–569), he adds that such unqualified ordinations are nonsensical because the new bishop would find himself leading people who are much more progressed in the faith and much saintlier (II, 1, 12, 570–574 and again 637–641)[224]. Gregory introduces this argument for its cogency as well as to compare the ascetic (575–609) and the worldly bishop (610–633), a compelling jab against his rival Nectarius. However, it is unclear from the text alone whether this argument refers to a concrete situation in the churches of Constantinople and of Nazianzus or whether the idea of the bishop guiding and teaching the ascetic is derived only from Nectarius's replacement of Gregory on the episcopal seat.

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223 Griffith 1995, 233; see also Vööbus 1958, 97–103; Nedungatt 1973; Sterk 2004, 20–45; Harvey 2005, 128–130.

224 Πῶς δὲ σὺ βλέπων κάτω / Τοῦτον μένοντα τοῦ Θεοῦ παραστάτην, / Ὑψαυχενεῖς τε καὶ θρόνων στέργεις κράτος, / Ἀλλ' οὐχὶ φρίσσεις, οὐδ' ἐπιτρέμεις θρόνοις, / Μὴ βοῦς ἐλαύνῃς κρείσσονας βοηλάτου; … Ὁ δ' ἐγκρατὴς ἔστηκεν ἠτιμωμένος, / Κάτω νενευκὼς, πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων, / Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν, οὗ μηδ' ἄξιος / Ἴσως μαθητὴς, οὗτος ὁ νῦν διδάσκαλος. / Εἴπερ τὸ κρατεῖν οὐ τόπῳ γνωρίζεται. Note the nice parallels and contrasts between these two figures: βλέπων κάτω (570) and πρὸς Θεὸν μόνον βλέπων (638), Ὑψαυχενεῖς (572) and Κάτω νενευκὼς (638), θρόνων στέργεις κράτος (572) and Στέργων μαθητοῦ χώραν (639). Similarly to what noted Meier 1989, 143, the entire argument of 541–641 expands on *or.* 43, 26 (see also §2.1.2.1). Moreover, the bishop is defined as σωφρονιστὴς παρθένων at II, 1, 12, 428.

A review of Gregory's other texts confirms the former: the bishop had to deal with ascetics, and this had always been one of Gregory's main problems in leading (or helping to lead) communities. Gregory reconciled his father with ascetics in Nazianzus after the Gregory the Elder had signed the Creed of Rimini-Constantinople, as witnessed by *or.* 6[225]. Around the same period, he acted as mediator in Caesarea between Basil with his ascetic community and the local bishop, Eusebius, as demonstrated *ep.* 16–19 and *or.* 43, 28[226]. As regards the Constantinopolitan period, it is likely that those who tried to stone Gregory in Constantinople were local ascetics[227]. Finally, in his last years in Nazianzus, he had to deal with Apollinarists, who may have been monks[228]. If we bear in mind these past dealings with ascetic groups, Gregory is arguing very compellingly when he says that a neophyte bishop will have a hard time leading ascetics, although he does not say explicitly why: past experiences made him wise on the resistance of ascetics to unworthy clergymen, especially if the latter were also theologically unprepared and of a different dogmatic persuasion from the ascetics; the fact that one could not ignore the pressure of these groups demonstrates that these ascetics were no anchorites isolated from the world, but lived in the community—often at its centre—and claimed a privileged voice in church matters. When dealing with these groups, ascetic credentials were an important asset for the bishop to maintain his authority.

This brings us to the main concern of both poets as regards asceticism: the notion of the bishop as responsible for ascetics is only alluded to, the main preoccupation being the bishop as ascetic himself. Here, however, there is a difference between the two poets: if Gregory presents more than once a well-rounded portrait of his ascetic-bishop, with recognizable traits that mark him as such, Ephrem, partly because he stands in a tradition of which we know less, is not always equally clear with the terminology he employs and often seems to allude to ascetic values without explicitly defining them. There are catchwords and recurring images which may allude to asceticism and are scattered throughout the poems.

3.2.1 The ascetics in Ephrem

A constellation of such words gravitates around the figure of Jacob, the first bishop of Nisibis. In the differential descriptions of the three bishops, where Babu is characterised by charity and Valgash by teaching, Jacob seems marked by "labour" (*ʿamlā*) and "triumph" (root *n-ṣ-ḥ*)[229]. The word *ʿamlā*, as recorded also by the dictionaries, is com-

225 McGuckin 2001a, 105–115, 133; Elm 2000a; Elm 2012, 201–212.

226 McGuckin 2001a, 131–135, 140–143.

227 Greg. Naz. *ep.* 77; McGuckin 2001a, 257.

228 McGuckin 2001a, 389.

229 "Against the first wrath / fought the toil [*ʿamlā*] of the first" (*CN* 13, 16, 1–2); "The good toil [*ʿamlā*] of the first / bound the land up in her distress" (*CN* 14, 2, 1–2); "The first tilled the earth with toil [*ʿamlā*]"

monly used for ascetic endeavour, even by Ephrem (or a poet near to him) in relation to the innovative anchorites of Edessa, a few years after our Nisibene poems[230]. The case of the root *n-ṣ-ḥ* is a bit more complicated. First, the root has no exact correspondence in the English language, because it covers the meanings of "glowing" or "shining", "flourishing", "strong", "glorious," and "triumphant" or "winning"[231]. In the dictionaries, it seems mostly associated with martyrs, especially the adjective *naṣṣīḥā*[232]. In Ephrem it is found to describe the relics of the apostle Thomas, but also for Old Testament patriarchs and, most of all, for the Edessene anchorites[233]. The occurrences of the word at *CN* 29 (13, 2; 14, 2; 15, 2) are deeply ambiguous, since they are accompanied by the attributes "chaste" (*nakpē*, 15, 1) and "mature" (*gmīrē*, 13, 2) and by a reference to "fasts" (15, 2), which may suggest ascetics, while the idea that their death is an "offering" to God (*qurbānā*, 16, 5–6) may suggest martyrs[234]. Moreover, in our poems *n-ṣ-ḥ* qualifies all the bishops, and it is also what the *bnay qyāmā* should be[235]. If one had to define a concept to encompass all these occurrences of the word, it would be that of "saint" in its functional sense: *naṣṣīḥā* and derivatives functionally correspond to "sanctity" and

(*CN* 14, 3, 1); "Before the One rewarding the wearied, / she [the church of Nisibis] brings the labour [*ʿamlā*] of the first;" (*CN* 14, 24, 1–2); "To the first siege resisted / the first, triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest" (*CN* 13, 17, 1–2); "Like the triumphant [*naṣṣīḥā*] priest Jacob, / with him she [the church of Nisibis] triumphed [*nṣaḥt*] like him" (*CN* 19, 16, 1–2). Cf. the reference to fasting: "The first priest by hand of fasting / had closed the gates of the mouths" (*CN* 14, 4, 1–2).

230 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2913–2914, *s.v.* ܚܕܝܥܠܐ; Sokoloff 2009, 1110, *s.v.* ܚܕܝܥܠܐ; *Abr. Kid.* 1, 4, 3; 15, 5; 20, 5; *Abr. Kid.* 5, 31, 2; *Iul. Saba* 3, 8, 1; 9, 1; 12, 1. The poems on Abraham Kidunaia and Julian Saba witness the beginnings of a new type of Syriac asceticism, one better known to us thanks to Theodoret's *History of the Monks of Syria* (Sterk 2004, 24–25); however, they can be useful in tracing the lexicon of asceticism, because we can assume that similar language applied to this new phenomenon and to previous styles of asceticism expresses similar realities, or at least perceptions (Griffith 1995, 237). Therefore, the otherwise generic word *ʿamlā*, applied poignantly to Jacob and to the Edessan anchorites suggests that the "labour" expressed is not that of ecclesiastical government, but of ascetic practice.

231 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2437–2439; Sokoloff 2009, 939–940.

232 Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2438, *s.v.* ܢܝ ܢܫܟ; Sokoloff 2009, 941, *s.v.* ܢܝ ܢܫܟ. But see Aphrahat *dem.* 6, 1: "let him run in the arena (*b-ʾagōnā*) as a winner (*naṣṣīḥā*)".

233 Thomas the apostle's relics: *CN* 42, refrain. Samuel and Joseph's bones: *CN* 42, 6, 6; *CN* 43, 2, 11. Job: *CN* 18, 7, 3. For ascetics: *Abr. Kid.* 1, 4, 1; 19, 2–3; *Abr. Kid.* 2, 5, 1; 6, 2; *Abr. Kid.* 3, refrain; 3, 1; 20, 3–4; *Abr. Kid.* 4, 1, 1; 5, 5; *Abr. Kid.* 5, 1; 4, 4; 22, 1; 27, 1; 30, 5; 31, 5; *Iul. Saba* 1, 2, 2; 3, 3; 4, 1; *Iul. Saba* 2, 4, 1; 4, 5; 6, 5; 15, 5; *Iul. Saba* 3, 2, 1; 4, 5; 6; 7, 1; 13, 5; *Iul. Saba* 4, 6, 5; 12, 1; 5.

234 "Lo! My virtuous were abducted / my mature and my triumphant [*gmīray w-naṣṣīḥay*]! … For each one with his character / honoured me, and with triumphs [*b-neṣḥānē*] … Where did my chaste ones [*nakpay*] come / triumphant in their fasts [*nāṣḥay b-ṣawmay-hōn*] … you chose them to be abducted / each one as your sacrifice [*l-qurbān-āk*]" (*CN* 29, 13, 1–2; 14, 1–2; 15, 1–2; 16, 5–6). *Gmīrē* for ascetics: Murray 2006, 258–259; the term is also prominent in the *Book of Steps*; death of the martyr as sacrifice: Moss 2010, 77–87.

235 "Three priests dazzling [*naṣṣīḥē*] / in likeness of the two luminaries" (*CN* 13, 1, 1–2); "in you we see all three of them // glorious [*naṣṣīḥē*] who parted from us;" (*CN* 17, 11, 4–5); "Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling [*naṣṣīḥē*]" (*CN* 19, 15, 1–2). "The covenant [*qyāmā*] in your tenure may be splendid [*netnaṣṣaḥ*]" (*CN* 21, 5, 8).

"saint", meaning a person worthy of extraordinary reverence because of her merits and inherent value. This is the only category encompassing Old Testament patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, ascetics, relics, and bishops; and a clear confirmation of this idea comes from the *Poems on Paradise*, where the souls in paradise are divided according to their merit into three categories (*hymn. parad.* 2, 11, 5–6): the "penitents" (*tayyābē*), occupying the ground level, the "righteous" (*zaddīqē*), occupying the middle level, and the "triumphant" (*naṣṣīḥē*), lodged in the "elevation" (*rawmā*)[236].

Without denying that, in comparison to Babu and Valgash, Jacob is presented as the ascetic bishop, Ephrem describes also Valgash and, later, Abraham as ascetics themselves. The ascetic values underscored by Ephrem for these two bishops are wholly traditional for Syriac Christianity: on a very down-to-earth level, those values are chastity, fasting, and waking. The importance of fasting and continence has already been highlighted. Wakefulness has an equally fundamental role, especially in connection with the concept of *vita angelica*—that is, the ascetic as imitating the angels; this concept can entail different practices depending on the community's understanding of angelic life. In Syriac, one of the names of the angels is *ʿīrē*, "the wakeful ones", derived from the narrative of Daniel 4, so that in Syriac asceticism, where the concept of *vita angelica* is very important, wakefulness and prayer wakes are equally important practices[237].

The ascetic values are summed up at *CN* 18, 1, 1–4:

ܟܗܢ ܐܝܟ ܪܒܐ ܗܘ ܘܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܕܟܝ ܘܙܗܝܪ
ܟܗܢ ܐܝܟ ܪܒܐ ܗܘ ܘܗܘ ܐܝܟ ܕܟܝ ܘܙܗܝܪ[238]
(*CN* 18, 1, 1–4)

Here, Ephrem remarks that the new bishop Abraham has taken on all the ascetic credentials of the previous bishop, Valgash, which means that both are, at least in Ephrem's literary portrait, ascetics. The choice of word by Ephrem is very poignant. The new bishop is *kāhnā*, a word which encompasses both the meaning of "priest" and of "bishop", whereas the old one is *rabbā*, which can mean both "bishop" and "master", so that the relationship of the two words can be interpreted either as priest and bishop (as it was *before* Valgash died and Abraham was elected) or as "bishop" and "predecessor", "master" (as it was at the time); but the words are also nearly synonymous, which reinforces the idea

236 Functional and etymological equivalents of *naṣṣīḥā* in Western languages would be μακάριος and *beatus*, terms which express a surplus of vitality and being, whereas the words of exclusion and purity, ἅγιος and *sanctus*, correspond to Syriac *qaddīšā* etymologically but, at least in Ephrem's language, not functionally: in Ephrem *qaddīšā* is not used generically in the sense of "saint", but it is still linked specifically with virginity and asceticism. A word of meaning and usage similar to *naṣṣīḥā* is *zhī*, which denotes "light", "splendour" but with a connotation of "purity" (at *CN* 19, 3, 5 for ascetics; at line 7 of priests; more than once for the liturgy: *CN* 18, 11, 10; 12, 4 referring to the body of the bishop for the liturgy; *CN* 21, 5, 2).

237 Bruns 2016.

238 "Lo! As he is priest [*kāhen*] after his bishop [*rabb-eh*], / shining [*zahyā*] after the splendid [*naṣṣīḥā*], // modest [*nakpā*] after the sober [*yaqqīrā*], / vigilant [*šahhārā*] after the fasting [*ṣayyāmā*]."

of a seamless succession between the two. Similarly, the other couples are synonymous, with slightly different connotations: both *zahyā* and *naṣṣīḥā* are associated with light, but the first has a connotation of purity, the latter of victory; *nakpā* and *yaqqīrā* can both mean “reverend”, “honourable”, but *nakpā* means also “modest”, “chaste”; *šahhārā* and *ṣawmāyā*, though they do not describe the same renunciation, are clearly employed so that the application of one to each bishop implies the application of the other too.

Valgash’s ascetic portrait immediately follows the stanzas already examined in §3.1.4.4—namely, *CN* 15, 3–4, in which the community was rebuked for its failure to conform to the bishop’s example. They constitute praise of the contested bishop, while at the same time aggravating the blame on the community—although only implicitly.

5 ܚܙܘ ܕܟܝܠܐ ܘܡܬܩܠܐ
ܐܝܬ ܠܡ̈ܠܘܗܝ ܘܒܥܒ̈ܕܘܗܝ
ܣܡܘ ܒܠܐ ܕܐܦ ܗ̈ܠܟܬܗ
ܡܫ̈ܘܚܬܐ ܕܫܠܝܐ ܩܢܝܢ
ܐܚܝܕ ܟܠܗ ܦ̈ܓܘܕܐ ܕܟܠܗ

6 ܗܘܐ ܠܗ̇ ܡܪܐ ܠܛܠܝܘܬܗ
ܕܒܢܗ̇ ܒܢܝܪܐ ܕܢܟܦܘܬܐ
ܠܐ ܐܙܕܠܠܘ ܗܕ̈ܡܘܗܝ
ܕܬܚܝܬ ܫܒܛܐ ܣܝܡܝܢ ܗܘܘ
ܨܒܝܢܗ ܩܛܝܪܐ ܗܘ̣ܐ ܠܗ

7 ܩܕܡ ܓܝܪ ܒܟܪ ܕܪܓܗ
ܕܩܕܡ ܒܟܪ ܕܥܒܘܪܗ
ܕܣܡ ܫܬܐܣ̈ܘܗܝ ܬܩܢܐܝܬ
ܗܘܐ ܪܝܫܐ ܒܙܥܘܪܘܬܗ
ܕܟܪܘܙܐ ܠܥܡܐ ܥܒܕܘܗܝ

8 ܝܬܝܪ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܢܬ ܟܪ̈ܘܙܐ
ܘܣܦܝܪ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܢܬ ܩܪ̈ܘܝܐ
ܘܡܠܝܠ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܢܬ ܚܟܝ̈ܡܐ
ܢܟܦܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܝܢܬ ܐܚ̈ܘܗܝ
ܘܝܩܝܪܐ ܒܝܢܬ ܚܒܪ̈ܘܗܝ

9 ܒܬܪ̈ܝܢ ܡܥܡܪ̈ܝܢ ܐܝܬܘܗܝ ܗܘܐ
ܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܟܠ ܚܝ̈ܘܗܝ
ܕܩܕܝܫܐ ܗܘܐ ܒܓܘ ܦܓܪܗ
ܘܝܚܝܕܝܐ ܒܓܘ ܒܝܬܗ
ܒܟܣܝܐ ܘܓܠܝܐ ܢܟܦܐ ܗܘܐ[239]
(*CN* 15, 5–9)

This praise of the bishop transmits a quantity of invaluable information. First, we note yet again the prevalence of the ideal of chastity, expressed through the ascetic keywords *nakpā* (6, 2; 8, 4; 9, 5) and *qaddīšā* (9, 3). The concept is conveyed also by the expression

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[239] “Look what measure [*kaylā*] and balance [*matqālā*] / is in his words and in his deeds, // Heed that even his paces / possess the metres of peace [*mušḥātā d-šelyā*]! // All of him has the reins [*pgūdē*] of the whole of him. /// He was a master for his youth [*ṭalyūt-eh*], / whose submission was the yoke of sobriety [*nakpūtā*]. // His members did not become wanton, / because they were put under the rod. // His will was a compulsion to him. /// For he anticipated and outpaced his rank / by hurrying and bearing an early fruit of habits; // because he laid his foundation firmly [*taqnā’īt*], / he became a leader [*rēšā*] in his youth, // as he was made preacher for the people. /// He was excellent among the preachers, / and he was learned among the lectors, // and he was eloquent among the sages [*ḥakkīmē*]; / he was chaste [*nakpā*] among his brethren, // and he was venerable [*yaqqīrā*] among his friends. /// In two dwellings was he / a solitary [*īḥīdāyā*] for his whole life, // being pure [*qaddīšā*] inside his body / and solitary [*īḥīdāyā*] inside his house [*bayt-eh*] // and both inwardly and outwardly chaste [*b-kasyā w-galyā nakpā*].”

"he was a master of his youth" (*mārā l-ṭalyūt-eh*, 6, 1), where youth is the age with the strongest *libido* and therefore the most prone to the opposite sin of lust[240]. Lines 3–4 of stanza 6 have the same meaning. Second, the insistence on the technical term *īḥīdāyā* is to be noted, because it guarantees that Ephrem is really talking of a form of institutional asceticism. In this respect, stanza 9 preserves precious information on the life of Syriac ascetics: Ephrem interprets the "singleness" (*īḥīdāyūtā*) of Valgash as chastity when referring to the body (*qaddīšūtā*), and solitude in reference to the place where he lived. This can be interpreted in two ways, either as a reference to anchoritic life or as a reference to the phenomenon of *subintroductae* and *agapetae*. Unfortunately, the fact that Valgash resided "in his house" (*b-gaw bayt-eh*, 9, 4) does not help us interpret the bishop's "singleness", because the word *baytā* is so generic it need not mean "house", but can also mean "room", "cell", which would not exclude anchoritic life outside the city. However, the external evidence suggests that this *baytā* was in fact Valgash's house in the city and that his solitude in it refers to the absence of women ascetics. The custom of cohabitation between ascetics of opposite sex was a rising concern in the fourth century, as witnessed by the third canon of Nicaea, and all the more in the Syriac churches: Aphrahat's *Demonstration 6* is mainly devoted to dissuading ascetics from living together with women and persuading women ascetics to consent to such an arrangement, but the theme is pervasive in Aphrahat's and Ephrem's treatments of the *bnay qyāmā*, which suggests a moment of crisis for the institution[241]. In such a historical context, Ephrem's remark on Valgash living alone in his house acquires much more significance as a rigoristic and not generally accepted choice; moreover, there is no evidence of Ephrem encountering anchorites before his exile in Edessa in 363.

Stanzas 7 and 8 confirm that Valgash did live in the city, because they describe his career in the ranks of the clergy, during which he passed through offices such as "preacher" (*kārōzā*, 7, 5; 8, 1), "lector" (*qārōyā*, 8, 2), "sage" (*ḥakkīmā*, 8, 3), and also "leader" (*rēšā*, 7, 4)[242]. Moreover, lines 4–5 of stanza 8 strongly suggest that Valgash's status was shared with a community of "brethren" (*'aḥē*) or "friends" (*ḥabbībē*). These two facts are better accounted for if we imagine Valgash's asceticism as rooted in city life rather than as a renouncing of the city for a vagrant life in the heath, a solitary one in the desert, or even the marginal life of Egyptian monks on the fringes of villages. Much to the

240 Sin and youth are closely associated, so that the sinful youth is almost a *topos*: "and since in you [Nisibis] sinned my youth [*ṭalyūt-(y)*] / in you may find grace my old age!" (*CN* 2, 20, 5–6). It is particularly associated with the patriarch Joseph (*Abr. Kid.* 11, 19; *Iul. Saba* 23, 19; *CN* 43, 2), who is seen as a young man when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife, making his resistance even more praiseworthy. Note these lines: "[Joseph] put on his youth [*ṭalyūt-eh*] the reins of chastity [*pgūdē d-nakpūtā*]" (*CN* 43, 2, 5–6); they bear strong similarities to *CN* 15, 5, 5; 6, 1–2.

241 Griffith 1995, 235–237.

242 *rēšā* is the normal term for "bishop" (§2.1.1), but here it could also be referred to other roles of leadership thanks to its general usage. Precise information on Valgash's career is lost, because Ephrem alludes to it as if the audience was already familiar with the different roles the bishop had in his youth. On the light these lines shed as regards the delegation of preaching duties from the bishop, see §3.1.3.2.

contrary, the "brethren" are at the very centre of the Christian community, since from their ranks the members of the clergy are selected, as was the case for Valgash. Moreover, the offices occupied by Valgash seem to be very public: the tasks of preacher and lector, for example, would have put him before the whole congregation. This passage disproves Elijah of Nisibis's note in his *Chronography*—supposedly taken from the "stories of the metropolitans of Nisibis"—that Valgash had been a hermit in the mountains around Edessa, presumably on the model of Julian Saba and Abraham Kidunaia, celebrated by Ephrem and his circle in that city. The claim is still repeated by Vööbus and Fiey[243].

From the point of view of imagery, chastity, the main form of ascetic renunciation, is characterised through metaphors of measure (stanza 5) and of coercion (stanza 6). This choice serves the wider imagery of the poem, in which the different phases of moral growth and the different behaviours they require are linked through the concept of "measure" or "proportion", and the measure to be applied to the community at its beginning is coercion[244]. This way, the poet casts the community that trespasses measure in contrast with the bishop who applied compulsion to himself during his youth to be able to exercise mercy to others in his old age[245]. As regards the origin of these metaphors, the metaphor of "measure" seems remarkably nonbiblical. I could not find any Bible passage in which "measure" is used as a metaphor of morally good behaviour, nor a passage employing the three terms used here by Ephrem[246]. On the contrary, the image was traditional in Greek culture, even before Aristotle gave it a philosophical foundation. A good example is a line from Hesiod: μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι· καιρὸς δ᾽ ἐπὶ πᾶσιν ἄριστος (Hesiod.

243 Vööbus 1960, 405; Fiey 1977, 31.

244 "Yet even if we, my brethren, / have confused the meters [*mušḥātā*] // and spoiled the discretion, / and are returned as schoolboys // for the perfection who called us, … It is us, then, whom the beginnings chastised, / and then chided us the middle, // the endings increased our sweetness, / but when our taste came, // our loss of flavour was greater." (*CN* 15, 10; 15). See §4.1.1. The word I translated as "schoolboys" (*yālōpē*) means exclusively "disciple", "pupil" or "recruit" by ancient writers, while Payne Smith 1879–1901, 214 *s.v.* ܝܠܦܐ, gives also the meaning of "scholar" "learned person". All other translators take this last meaning and render: "we became master to ourselves of the perfection that was calling us" (Bickell 1866, 104; Stopford 1989, 184; Fhégali/Navarre 1989, 55). Beck however translates the word *yālōpē* as "Schüler". Considering the following verses, in which the theme of regression is prominent, Beck's translation, despite its unusual ring (to be a disciple is normally seen as a positive attitude in contrast with the pride of who wants to be teacher), is to endorse. For the bishop as teacher, see §2.2.4.4.

245 "As a leader, both chaste and venerable, / without raging nor grudging, // he didn't swerve as we had done, / but defined and preserved his measures, // and gave the reins to his reason. … Hence the mild resisted patiently, / and didn't use compulsion, // so as to honour greatly our old age; / and since she knew not her degree, // let him be honoured who knew her time." (*CN* 15, 12; 17).

246 *Kaylā*; *matqālā*; *mušḥātā*, the first used mostly for volume, the second for weight and the third for dimension or age; see Lev. 19:35: *b-massa'tā b-matqālā wa-b-kyāltā*, where however the word *mušḥātā* does not appear and *massa'tā* is present in its stead. The three words of measure are here used in their literal sense, in a ban against dishonesty in financial transactions. Similarly, *kaylā*, *matqālā* and *mušḥātā* do appear elsewhere in Ephrem (*hymn. fid.* 30, 1–4 and *hymn. haer.* 53, 5) but they have completely different meanings from here, referring in *hymn. fid.* to physics and in *hymn. haer.* to poetry and metre. For a discussion of these terms, see Beck 1983. A possible exception might be Sir. 21:25, where *b-matqālā* describes how the wise man speaks.

op. 694), which resembles "the measure of truth [*mušḥat-quštā*] / preserved herself [*nāṭrā napš-āh*] in his vessel" (*CN* 15, 11, 1–2). Aeschylus (*choeph.* 794–799) speaks of imposing μέτρον and ῥυθμός on a horse, which parallels Ephrem's imagery of *Kayal* (measure of capacity, as μέτρον) and *mušḥtā* (poetic metre) and of the reins (*pgūdē*) at *CN* 15, 5[247]. Without posing a direct filiation of Ephrem's image from the quoted texts, one can rightly infer that the comparison suggests that this imagery was more at home in Greek than in the Bible, so that Ephrem's employment of it may be a trace of hellenisation.

Shared imagery between the ascetic bishop and the congregation points to another facet of episcopal asceticism, one deeply connected with Ephrem's view of the episcopal office: teaching by example. Shared imagery expresses the failure or success of the community to conform to the behaviour of its bishop. The importance of example for the bishop had been already pointed out in more than one respect (see §2.2.3; §3.1.4.3), but here its link with ascetic ideals should be highlighted. It is well known that the early Syriac church considered ascetics the ideal Christians and the living sign of what Christians should be; this elite status before their community was heightened by the fact that they lived in the midst of it and served it, differently from anchorites. This ideal is shared by Ephrem, as witnessed, for example, by his remark that the flock Abraham received from his master is composed "for the third and fourth part of virgins" (*CN* 19, 6, 8–9). If, however, asceticism is the true Christian ideal and if the primary teaching method of the bishop is example, necessarily the ideal bishop should be an ascetic. This train of thought is expressed at *CN* 15, 3–4 (see §3.1.4.4) and in the first stanzas of *CN* 16 (1–6; see §2.2.3.3), where the bishop is compared to a mirror and where moral improvement is expressed with the metaphor of "ornament" (*ṣebtā*). In Aphrahat, "ornament" is almost always mentioned in its literal sense; therefore, the writer here is giving it a negative connotation as a sign of vanity[248]. In Ephrem, the image is instead used metaphorically and with positive connotations for the good deeds of the saint, and among these especially ascetic practices[249]. With Ephrem, "adornment" becomes one of the standard expressions for asceticism.

Ephrem also portrays Abraham as an ascetic bishop. Ascetic values, such as chastity and fasting, are mentioned throughout the poems on Abraham, making clear his

247 Other uses of μέτρον as "due measure" in a moral sense can be found at Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1123, *s.v.* μέτρον. For the double meaning of μέτρον as moral measure and poetic prosody in Gregory see §1.3.2.

248 The exception is *dem.* 6, 10, where Aphrahat says to ascetics: "Jesus does not ask anything else for himself from us but that we adorn (*nṣabbet*) our temple for him".

249 In particular see: "The diligent [*kāšrē*] carry their own fruits / and now run forward // to meet Paradise / as it exults with every sort of fruit. // They enter that Garden/ with glorious deeds [*neṣḥānē*], // and it sees / that the fruit of the just / surpass in their excellence / the fruits of its own trees // and that the adornment of the victorious [*ṣebtē d-naṣṣīḥē*] / outrival its own [*l-taṣbīt-āh*]" (*hymn. parad.* 6, 11; tr. Brock 1990, 112–113), a stanza crowded with ascetic terminology. The same idea at *CN* 13, 11, 4, where Nisibis as "daughter born of vows" (*bartā ba*(*r*)*t-nedrē*, *CN* 13, 11, 3) is said to have received "ornament [*taṣbītā*] corresponding to its beauty [*šupr-āh*]", meaning that the bishops agreed in the ascetic outlook of the community and reinforced it.

belonging to the same ascetic order, the *bnay qyāmā*, as Valgash[250]. Among these values, the poems on Abraham give pride of place to poverty: in three different stanzas the poet identifies in poverty the most significant legacy of the previous bishops, founding the legitimacy of the new one.

8 ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܝܬ ܒܗ ܒܥܠܡ ܫܘܝ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܟܕ ܐܙܠ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܚܫܘ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ, ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܬܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܫܬܝ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
...

15 ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
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ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
(*CN* 19, 8; 15)

ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܐܡܪ ܠܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܒܟ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡܪ ܒܗ ܒܡܫܝܚܐ
(*CN* 21, 2)

These stanzas share the same connection of three different themes: episcopal succession, poverty, and teaching. The passage of offices from a bishop to his successor, in two cases exemplified by the biblical paradigm of transmission of charisma—namely, by the narrative of Elijah and Elisha (1Reg. 19; 2Reg. 2)—is played out essentially as

250 *CN* 17, 4, 7–8 (fasting and prayer, the same values underlined by Aphrahat in *dem.* 6); *CN* 17, 8, 10 and 12, 5–6 (image of ornament); *CN* 18, 1; *CN* 19, 1 and *CN* 20, 1 (virginity); *CN* 21, 1–4; 6; 9 (fasting, chastity, poverty and other ascetic virtues).

251 "Helija's poverty **[***meskēnūt-eh***]** / loved Elisha more than riches, // the poor **[***meskēnā***]** gave to the poor / the gift that's great above all. // Because you loved the misery **[***ṣrīkūt-eh***]** / of your master, the inwardly rich [*'attīrā kasyā*], // May the fountain of his words gush from you, / so that you become the Spirit's lyre, // and he sings to you in you his wills. / **Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!** /// Without testament departed those / three priests dazzling, // but since they meditated on those / two testaments of God, // a big inheritance they left us, / namely the model of poverty [*ṭupsā d-meskēnūtā*]; // without possessing anything / those blessed made us their possession: // their church was their treasure! / **Blessed is he who bought through them his possession!** ///.

252 A great bliss was concealed / in Elijah's poverty; // Elisha served him and claimed / a double reward for his service, // double virtue she gave him, / as he twice put on her noble deeds **[***neṣḥān-ēh***]**. // Because you loved the poverty / of your rich master, Valgash, // may you inherit the treasure of his wisdom. / **Blessed is he who enriched your teaching!**".

the transmission of a way of life marked first and foremost by poverty. If the recipient embraces this way of life, he is also endowed with the authority to teach. This is very clear in *CN* 19, 8 and *CN* 21, 2, which showcase the reference to Elijah and Elisha, but less so in *CN* 19, 15, where the nexus between succession in poverty and teaching is not so explicit. However, the puns of the stanza imply a relation with teaching: Ephrem plays with the double meaning of the word *dīatēkē*, which can mean either "last will and testament" or any of the two biblical Testaments. The "testament" the previous bishops leave is a *ṭupsā*, a charged word in Ephrem's language, because it defines one of the chief procedures of his biblical interpretation[253]. Therefore, in leaving a "model of poverty", the bishops have also left a model through which to read Scripture; therefore, their testament is the Testaments. The combination of these three themes, poverty, succession, and teaching, is to be understood, as has already been said, in relation to the importance of teaching by example for Ephrem: the bishops transmit not only an office and a charisma but also an example; ideally, the successor is selected in the community, and specifically in its inner circle of ascetics, for his conformity to the example of the predecessor, so that he will be able to transmit to the community at large and to his successor the same way of life[254].

Such reasoning would work for any particular ascetic value, so that it remains to be asked why Ephrem develops it especially for poverty. A hint may lie in the fact that in *CN* 21 Ephrem singles out greed among the many moral problems a community may face (see §3.1.4.4). If we piece together *CN* 19, 8 and 15, *CN* 21, 2, and 7–8 and 14–15, this picture emerges: the community faced a period of dire necessity and trial ("thirst", *ṣhē*, *CN* 21, 15, 5–6; "trial", *nesyānā*, 16, 5; "by force", "yoke", *ba-qṭīrā*, *nīrā*, 17, 1–2), during which people of different social classes ("rich and poor", 15, 7) resorted to stealing and plundering (14, 3–4; 15); since this period is characterised as a trial of faith (16–17) and is closed by the news of a new emperor (14), it is likely that Ephrem is here referring to Julian's reign, which is also alluded to in stanza 18 and whose end overlaps with Abraham's accession in Ephrem's poetic construction (see *CN* 18, 5–8)[255]. In this context, it is difficult to interpret the identities of the "plunderers" of *CN* 21, 14 and of the "thieves" of stanza 15: Were they the same or different categories? Did they or did they not correspond to the Christians tested by God in stanzas 16–17? If the plundering and stealing are to be brought in relation to the prevalence of greed in the Christian community deprecated at stanzas 7–8, then plunderers and thieves identify with the Christians in their trial. It is conceivable that, with the progressive approach of Julian for the Persian campaign and the presence of the Mesopotamian army in the city, the state of the population at large, and of Christians in particular,

253 On this word, see Yousif 1986, 42; Bou Mansour 1987, 224–231.

254 On the tendency in the Syriac churches to have ascetics preach or be ordained, even after asceticism has moved away from the *bnay qyāmā* model towards a more anchoritic way of life: Escolan 1999, 227–346.

255 On the alleged hardships of this period and its interpretation by Ephrem, see §2.2.2; §4.1.2.

deteriorated[256]. In this fraught situation, more than one Nisibene, maybe even Christians, may well have resorted to theft or pillage, and not always out of necessity. If this were true, Ephrem's insistence on the ascetic poverty of the bishops would be addressed more to the congregation than to the bishop himself, who already practiced various ascetic virtues.

This, however, leaves the role of the church unaddressed, which Ephrem recalls in *CN* 21, 8, 2–4: the church should concentrate on acquiring souls more than money. Although in this context such a remark may seem to imply that the church stole like the individuals, it must be noted that the idea is not even suggested in stanzas 14–17, where the accusations of stealing and pillaging are made. Much to the contrary, stanza 19 implies that the church emerged in disarray from Julian's reign: "May their [the churches'] ornaments return [*net'aṭpān*]" (line 4). If this is true, then Ephrem's exhortation to the bishop to let the church acquire souls rather than money assumes a concrete meaning: the bishop, in accordance with the ascetic values he received from his predecessors, should waive his claim to redress for ecclesiastical losses during Julian's reign—a redress which would be all too easy to obtain under Christian emperors—and he should be sympathetic to those who, out of necessity, could not refrain from stealing at the time; on the contrary, he should impose on himself and on the rich ones of the community an ascetic behaviour, thereby winning more souls. Therefore, the stress laid upon poverty among the ascetic values in the last poems on Abraham works in two directions: on one side, it exhorts the congregation to imitate the bishop and renounce riches and luxury; on the other, it is a political direction for the bishop, suggesting that he drop some of the church's rights in favour of a more sympathetic attitude towards the population.

3.2.2 The ascetics in Gregory

In Gregory's poetry, the relevance of asceticism for the bishop is made clear by the many extensive portraits of the ideal candidate for the episcopate, which are also concrete "rules" of Gregory's ideal ascetic. Furthermore, they are presented as self-portraits,

256 *. . . ilico (ut ante cogitaverat) triginta milia lectorum militum eidem commisit Procopio, iuncto ad parilem potestatem Sebastiano comite ex duce Aegypti, eisdemque praecepit, ut intra Tigridem interim agerent, vigilanter omnia servaturi, nequid inopinum ex incauto latere oreretur, qualia multa saepe didicerat evenisse, mandabatque eis ut (si fieri potius posset), regi sociarentur Arsaci, cumque eo per Corduenam et Moxoenam, Chiliocomo uberi Mediae tractu, partibusque aliis praestricto cursu vastatis, apud Assyrios adhuc agenti sibi concurrerent, necessitatum articulis adfuturi* (Amm. Marc. 23, 3, 5): this road would have brought the army through Nisibis (Harrell 2016, chapter 13). Ammianus relates also that Julian celebrated pagan festivities in the different stops of his campaign, particularly in the shrine of the Moon-god Sin in Harran (Amm. Marc. 23, 3, 2 and 7); this may have prompted Nisibis' authorities to conform to the emperor's paganism in order to mollify him to their pleads (see Griffith 1987, 256–257).

so that the definition of an ascetic rule, the plea for a renewed episcopate, and the defence of his credentials and choices in a concrete polemic converge in them. It is not at random that they are often contrasted with the portrait of the worldly bishop: they thereby betray their polemical aim. The passage II, 1, 12, 54–63; 71–75 is part of the larger autobiographical *narratio* of Gregory's invective, in which his story is steadily and allusively compared to Nectarius's background (43–153). II, 1, 12, 576–609 is followed by a portrait of the worldly man, unworthy of leading the ascetic (610–633). II, 1, 13, 107–113 is included in the picture of the throng of candidates approaching the altar to be consecrated bishop, with the stronger (and less qualified) ones jostling away the ascetic (96–115), an image similar to that in *or.* 2, 3, 8[257]. II, 1, 17, 25–40 concludes the first section of the poem (1–40), in which the lives of the bad and good bishop are compared.

This combination of rule, apology, and invective makes these passages centrepieces for our poems. It will be helpful to present them side by side, to notice the differences and the common points

Ἄλλος μὲν ἐξήντλησε μοχθηρὸν βίον,
Στένων, ἀϋπνῶν, δάκρυσιν τήκων μέλη,
Χαμευνίᾳ τε καὶ τροφῇ στενούμενος,
Καὶ νοῦ μερίμναις, ἐν θεοπνεύστοις Γραφαῖς,
Μάστιξί θ' αὐτὸν ταῖς ἔσω ξαίνων ἀεί.
Τί μοι παρεῖται; μὴ δέον τί τ' ἔδρασα;
Ἄλλος τὰ τερπνὰ τῶν νέων ἐδρέψατο,
Ἔπαιξεν, ᾗδε, γαστρὸς ἔπλησεν νόσον,
Πάσαις ἐφῆκεν ἡδοναῖς, αἰσθήσεσιν,
Κλεῖθρ' οὐκ ἔθηκε, πῶλος ἡνίας ἄτερ.
. . .
Ἄνω καθήμενόν με τῶν ὀρωμένων,
Καὶ νοῦν μόνοις μιγνύντα τοῖς νοουμένοις,
Ῥίψαντα δόξαν, κτῆσιν, ἐλπίδας, λόγους,
Τὸ μὴ τρυφᾶν τρυφῶντα, καὶ μάζῃ στενῇ
Βίον γλυκαίνονθ', ὕβρεως ἐλεύθερον
(II, 1, 12, 54–63; 71–75)

One endures a life of hardships,
groaning, sleepless, through tears wasting his limbs away,
sleeping on the ground and feeding scarcely,
and with anxious examining of the Divine Scriptures
and inner scourges mangling himself:
What have I missed? What wrong have I committed?
Another one has plucked all the pleasures of youth,

257 μεταποιοῦνται τοῦ βήματος, θλίβονταί τε καὶ ὠθοῦνται περὶ τὴν ἁγίαν τράπεζαν (Greg. Naz. *or.* 2, 3, 8); θείην δὲ περιθλίβοισθε τράπεζαν, / Στεινόμενοι, στεινοῦντες. Ὁ δ' ἄλκιμος ἄλλον ἐλαύνοι (II, 1, 13, 106–107). Περιθλίβω is a Gregorian formation, later taken on by Nonnus (*Dion.* 10, 370; 17, 371).

has danced, sung, has satisfied his feverish belly,
to all sorts of lust yielded, for the senses
failed to fit a bolt, a colt without reins.
. . .
I was seated above visible things,
touching with thought only the intelligibles
and casting off fame, property, hopes, erudition,
in not taking delight I took delight, with a scanty loaf
sweetening life, free from insolence of pride (75)

Οὗτος χαμεύνης, καὶ κόνει βεβρωμένος,
Καὶ σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις,
Ψαλμῳδίαις τε καὶ στάσει νυχθημέρῳ,
Καὶ νοῦ πρὸς ὕψος ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημίαις.
(τί γὰρ τάφοις δεῖ εἰσφέρειν τὸν χοῦν ὅλον, (580)
Σκώληξί τ' εἶναι δαψιλεστέραν τροφὴν,
Γεννῶντα, καὶ τρέφοντα τοὺς γεννωμένους;)
Καὶ δακρύων ἔσμηξε πηγαῖς τοὺς σπίλους,
Εἴ πού τιν' εἶχε καὶ βραχὺν ῥαντίσμασιν,
Οἷς βάλλεθ' ὅστις καὶ σοφὸς πηλῷ βίου· (585)
Τύποις τε σαρκῶν ἐσφράγισται τιμίοις
Ἐσκληκότων εὐχῇ τε καὶ πολλοῖς πόνοις
(Οἷς ἡ παλαιὰ γεῦσις ἐτρύχωσέ με
Εἰς γῆν στραφέντα τὴν τιθηνὸν μητέρα),
Ῥίγει τε, πείνῃ, καὶ στενοῖς ῥακώμασιν (590)
Ποθῶν λαβεῖν ἔνδυμα τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν,
Καὶ γαστρὸς ὕβριν ἐνδεεῖ καθύβρισε
Τροφῇ, τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν.
Τροφὴν γὰρ οἶδεν ἀγγέλων ἁπλῆν Θεόν.
Οὗτος πένης νῦν, ἦν δ' ὅτε ζάπλουτος ἦν· (595)
Ἀλλ' ἐκβολὴν ἔστερξε, καὶ κοῦφος πλέει,
Ῥίψας πένησιν, οὐ βυθῷ, τὸ φορτίον.
Οὗτος φυγὼν πόλεις τε καὶ δήμων κρότους,
Καὶ τὴν ζάλην, ἣ πάντα τὰν μέσῳ στρέφει,
Τοῦ νοῦ τὸ κάλλος τῷ Θεῷ προσήρμοσεν, (600)
Μόνος τὰ θεῖα καὶ μόνῳ κοινούμενος.
Οὗτος τὸ καλὸν σῶμα (πῶς γὰρ οὐ καλὸν
Τὸ τῶν ἀρίστων) μαργάροις συνέκλεισε,
Δεσμοῖς σιδηροῖς, λαθρίῳ κοσμήματι,
Σφίγξας ἑαυτὸν οὐδὲν ἡδικηκότα, (605)
Ὡς μήποθ' ὑβρίσειεν ὢν ἐλεύθερος,
Καὶ συνδέων αἴσθησιν αὐτῷ τὴν πλάνον.
Τούτῳ τὸ Πνεῦμ' ἔδειξε γράμματος βάθη,
Λῦσαν τὰ πολλῶν ἐσφραγισμένα φρεσί.
(II, 1, 12, 576–609)

This one sleeps on the ground, devoured by ashes,
and he wasted away his flesh with vigils,
chanting the psalms and standing night and day,

and exiling his thoughts from the crass to the sublime
(for why should one entrust to the graves one's whole dust
and be for the worms a more lavish food,
begetting and feeding the begotten?),
and with springs of tears he wiped clean his stains,
if he ever had the smallest of sprinklings,
whence even the wise is affected in the mire of life.
He was sealed with worthy signs in his flesh,
parched by prayer and manifold toils
(with them the ancient tasting afflicted me,
turning me to earth, our nurturing mother),
and he shudders, with his hunger and meagre rags
desiring to reach the clothing of incorruption.
He did violence to the violence of belly with scant
food, wooing death each day:
for he knew the only food of angels is God.
This one is now poor, but there was a time when he was very rich.
He, though, preferred jettisoning and sailing light,
casting the load not to the abyss but to the poor.
This one, fleeing the cities and the applause of the crowd
and the storm that shakes all public things,
fitted closely to God the dignity of thought,
alone devoted to divine matters with himself alone.
This one enclosed his beautiful body (for how can the body
of the best not be beautiful?) with pearls—
iron chains, a hidden ornament—
thereby binding himself though innocent,
lest he trespass, even when free,
and binding together with himself the erring senses.
To such a man the Spirit taught the depths of Scripture,
loosening what's sealed for the minds of the many.

Ὁ δ' ἄλκιμος ἄλλον ἐλαύνοι,
Πολλάκι καί τ' ἄριστον, ἐνιδρώσαντα θρόνοισι,
Γηραιὸν, σάρκεσσι τετρυμένον, οὐρανοφοίτην,
Κόσμον ἀτιμάζοντα, Θεοῦ μετὰ μοῖραν ἔχοντα,
Καὶ νέκυν ἐν ζωοῖσι, θυηπόλον ἐσθλὸν Ἄνακτος.
Εἰκὼ μέν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ' εἰκόνος ἀρχετύποιο,
Στησάμενος προπάροιθε, πίναξ δ' ὑπεδέξατο μορφήν
(II, 1, 13, 107–113)

Let the strong drive away the other,
often even the better, who sweated in these seats,
old aged, worn out in the flesh, conversant with the heaven,
despising the world and having his lot with God,
a dead among the living and a faithful priest of the King.
One paints an image from its model,
setting it before himself, and the board takes up its form

Ὧι ζώει μούνῳ καὶ τέρπεται· ᾧ ῥα κεάζει
Θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἔνθεν ἀνιστάμενος.
Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι
Κάμπτεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυόεις ἀδάμας·
Οὐδ' ὅ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θοώκων,
Οὐ δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης·
Οὐδὲ δορὴν βασιλῆος ἔχων βριαροῖο λέοντος,
Κεύθει κερδῴην ἔνδοθι δουλοσύνην,
Νεκροβόρος, δολόμητις, ἀτάσθαλος, ἄλλος ἐν ἄλλοις
Παντοδαποῖς κακίης εἴδεσι κλεπτόμενος.
Ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων,
Ἤδη καὶ Τριάδος ἅπτεται οὐρανίης,
Ἧς τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῇσι,
Κῦδος ἓν ἐν τρισσοῖς κάλλεσι δερκόμενος,
Καὶ λαὸν θυέεσσιν ἀγνοῖς θεοειδέα τεύχων,
Ὑστάτιον ψυχῆς θύματ' ἄναιμα φέρει.
(II, 1, 17, 25–40)

For him alone he lives and rejoices, for him he rips
his heart apart from earthly things, turned away from here.
To good people he gives mind; to the evil, however,
he bows like a rugged, inflexible stone.
Neither does he turn to riches or important thrones,
nor the ephemeral glory that creeps along here,
nor with the skin of the violent king, the lion,
does he conceal inside servile self-interest,
scavenger, skilled in deceit, wicked, shifting concealer
of shifting and various kinds of misdeeds.
Rather, nourishing his mind with pure thoughts,
he already grasps the heavenly Trinity,
whose image he fixed in his own senses,
beholding one glory in triple beauties;
then, making the people Godlike with holy sacrifices,
he will finally bring the bloodless offerings of soul.

My analysis will proceed from the concrete data (§3.2.2.1) to overarching questions of spirituality (3.2.2.2) and the kind of ascetic ideology Gregory is pushing (§3.2.2.3).

3.2.2.1 Ascetic practices

First, note that in these portraits the poet does not really highlight virginity. This starkly differs not only from Ephrem but also from many other poems in which Gregory forcefully argues for the superiority of celibacy or virginity over marriage[258]. And yet mar-

258 Gautier 2002, 29–36. Two notable texts are the praise of virginity at I, 2, 1 and II, 1, 45, which contains Gregory's description of his ascetic initiation by Ἀγνεία and Σωφροσύνη in dream, analysed by McGuckin 2001a, 63–76.

riage, family, and lust feature prominently in the portrayals of bad candidates for the episcopate (§5.2.2–3). It could well be that a recommendation of celibacy goes without saying in this ascetic context and is sufficiently implied by the mentions of family and marriage in the negative portraits. Assuming, however, that this absence is significant, I would explain it in light of some of Gregory's acquaintances and of the question of Encratism: avoiding a strong defence of virginity in this context would safeguard the poet from accusations of holding ideas similar to those condemned at Gangra; it would also prevent indirect criticism against Gregory the Elder, Gregory's father and bishop of Nazianzus, and of Gregory of Nyssa, one of Gregory's allies and a married man[259]. Despite all their links with Gregory's own experience, these portraits are still generic and have a prescriptive function, so that an endorsement of virginity in this context might have sounded like a statement of doctrine contrary to Gangra. Differently, Ephrem is always praising individual bishops when he highlights virginity, so that, even if virginity emerges as strongly advisable, his poems cannot be construed as contradicting Gangra and the current practice of the church. Hence, the absence of virginity in Gregory and its strong presence in Ephrem are more a function of the literary context (disciplinary polemic or praise of an individual) in which the poets present ascetic values than a clue of different positions.

As for the practices endorsed by the poems, waking and sleeping on the ground (χαμευνία) seem to enjoy pride of place[260]. This betrays a Syrian view of asceticism, similar to that held by Ephrem, reinforced by the fact that these wakes should be occupied with liturgies (Ψαλμῳδίαις, II, 1, 12, 578), as in the Syriac writers; on the other side, Aristotle attributed sleeplessness to the godhead, and Plato described Eros—the model of the philosopher—as one who sleeps on the ground (χαμαιπετής)[261]. Fasting is another favourite of Syrian asceticism, and Gregory duly mentions it more than once, sometimes with Cynic language (μάζῃ στενῇ, II, 1, 12, 74–75)[262], more often connecting it with key ideas of his ascetic theory: poverty (II, 1, 12, 56; 74) and detachment from physical reality, partly as anticipation of death (579–-582) and resulting in a veritable

259 Εἴ τις διακρίνοιτο παρὰ πρεσβυτέρου γεγαμηκότος, ὡς μὴ χρῆναι λειτουργήσαντος αὐτοῦ προσφορᾶς μεταλαμβάνειν, ἀνάθεμα ἔστω (canon 4 of the Synod of Gangra; canons 1, 9, 10, 13–17 are all in defence of marriage and family). The relevance of Gangra for the Cappadocians, most of all in relation to their links with Eustathius of Sebaste and his asceticism, are examined by Gautier 2002, 24–28 and Sterk 2004, 27–32. On Gregory of Nyssa's marriage, see Daniélou 1956.

260 Ἀϋπνῶν and χαμευνίᾳ (II, 1, 12, 55–56); Οὗτος χαμεύνης, καὶ κόνει βεβρωμένος, / Καὶ σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις, / Ψαλμῳδίαις τε καὶ στάσει νυχθημέρῳ (II, 1, 12, 576–578).

261 Aristotle on the sleeplessness of the gods: *eth. Nic.* 1178b 18; of the analogy between the waking state and the Prime Cause: διαγωγὴ δ᾽ἐστὶν οἵα ἡ ἀρίστη μικρὸν χρόνον ἡμῖν (οὕτω γὰρ ἀεὶ ἐκεῖνο: ἡμῖν μὲν γὰρ ἀδύνατον), ἐπεὶ καὶ ἡδονὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια τούτου (καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἐγρήγορσις αἴσθησις νόησις ἥδιστον, ἐλπίδες δὲ καὶ μνῆμαι διὰ ταῦτα) (*metaph.* 1072b)). See also: Sprague 1977. Plato on Eros: χαμαιπετὴς ἀεὶ ὢν καὶ ἄστρωτος, ἐπὶ θύραις καὶ ἐν ὁδοῖς ὑπαίθριος κοιμώμενος (*conv.* 203D).

262 Dziech 1925, 105–106 with n. 199; Meier 1989, 83–84; Prudhomme 2006, 401.

battle against bodily functions (592–593)[263]. Another important practice is weeping (55; 583), which, as clarified by 583, has a penitential function. This is a further clue to the Syrian strain of asceticism Gregory subscribes to[264]. Line 587 of II, 1, 12 mentions praying (εὐχή), an activity which plays a central role in Ephrem's view of asceticism, considering the number of times it is mentioned. Here it seems less important, but the first impression is not correct: if we intend prayer as communication with God, as opposed to specific request to the Godhead or liturgies, then we shall see that prayer is the very aim of ascesis[265].

In the context of this asceticism, which does not exclude civilised life or even explicitly forbids marriage, the practice described at II, 1, 12, 602–607 appears as a foreign body: fastening heavy iron chains on one's person under the clothes (λαθρίῳ κοσμήματι, 604). This kind of spectacular exercise, bordering on self-harm, is normally connected with fifth-century Syrian asceticism, although the language has a long prehistory: the metaphorical use of "pearls" (μαργάροις) for the chains goes back to Ignatius of Antioch (*Eph.* 11, 2, alluding presumably to a necklace of pearls), but the pearl is often associated with virginity and ascetics by Ephrem, and relics of the ascetics are metaphorically treated as jewels and treasures, so that the word *margānītā*, "pearl," is used both for relics and for virginity[266]. Furthermore, the word κόσμημα for the ascetic object recalls the link between "ornament" language and ascesis already highlighted in the case of Ephrem. If we take into account later examples of the practice, we find that Jacob the Solitary, disciple of saint Maron, is credited with this exercise by Theodoret (*hist. rel.* 21, 8). Similarly, Simeon Stylites is said to have fastened himself with an iron chain to a rock in order not to be able to leave his pillar (Theodrt. *hist. rel.* 26, 10). The biblical model of this practice may be Paul (see, for example, Eph. 6:20) or Samson (Iudc.

263 At 592–594 the practice of fasting relates to death and angelic life. The ascetic imitates the angels, whose sole nutrition is contemplation of God; yet the connection between fasting and the phrase τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν is more difficult. According to Meier 1989, 138, the Homeric verb μνώμενος here means "to woo" and it is to be intended metaphorically as "to see as an advantage". This agrees with its governing in this clause, because μνάομαι means "to woo" when it governs the accusative. It could also be linked with the idea of angelic life: the ascetic starves himself desiring to die, because he knows he will be nourished once dead participating in the life of the angels (something similar to what Paul says in Phil. 1:21–23). Similarly, II, 1, 13, 111 characterises the ascetic as "dead among the living", a reference to his detachment from life through asceticism (for the trope of the living dead: Gautier 2002, 49–50, 77–79). If, however, we consider this "suicidal" use of fasting exaggerated, either because of Gregory's usage of μνάομαι with the accusative (see I, 2, 25, 495 and II, 1, 11, 1669), which denotes a concrete intention or desire, or because angelic life and human death may not be so obviously linked, then the verb must mean "to remember", "to meditate" (as interpreted by Caillau) and the clause must refer to the spiritual exercise of meditation on death, analysed and explained by Hadot 2005, 49–58.

264 Griffith 1995, 234–235 discusses the concept of *'abīlā*, "mourner", which sometimes defines Syrian ascetics. On tears see also §3.1.4.3.

265 For prayer in the sense of communication with God in Gregory's writings: Gautier 2002, 121.

266 Ephr. Syr. *hymn. fid.* 81, 3; 82, 2; *hymn. haer*. 42, 9–10; Payne Smith 1879–1901, 2215, *s.v.* ܡܪܓܢܝܬܐ; Fredrikson 2003; Buck 1999, 123–124.

16:21), but it obviously echoes the condition of martyrs and confessors (Ign. *Eph.* 11, 2; *Smyrn.* 11, 1; Polycarp. *ad Philipp.* 1, 1). One would think that Gregory, in his rejection of excessive and subversive forms of asceticism, did not approve such practices[267]. And yet the oft-repeated expression "wear out the flesh" or "wear out the body" points to this self-harming and visible brand of asceticism[268].

Both the extreme acts of asceticism and the self-harming aim remind us of another passage from Gregory's poems which describes the ascetics of Nazianzus to Hellenius, the *peraequator* of Cappadocia[269]. The poem aims to persuade Hellenius to give a tax exemption to some of the ascetics mentioned by Gregory. Yet it is unclear how the description of extreme feats of asceticism relates to this aim, since the ascetics who are mentioned by name seem to belong to Gregory's social class and to practice a much tamer brand of asceticism[270]. Gautier believes that Gregory is mentioning the extreme feats only to convince Hellenius and not because they were representatives of asceticism in Nazianzus, while McLynn says that these feats refer to ascetics abroad from Nazianzus, whose example is introduced in order to dispel a prejudice against asceticism in his town, a prejudice which could undermine his case[271]. In any event, there

267 On Gregory's refusal of the extreme acts of Syrian ascetics: Gautier 2002, 95–104.

268 Δάκρυσιν τήκων μέλη (II, 1, 12, 55); σάρκας ἐξέτηξεν ἐν ἀγρυπνίαις (577); Γηραιὸν, σάρκεσσι τετρυμένον (II, 1, 13, 109). The simple verb τήκων and the use of μέλη or σάρκας for σῶμα are poetic, whereas the composite ἐκτήκω is prosaic. In Homer the only part of the body "molten" with this verb is the skin of one's face, as a metaphor for crying (*Od.* 19, 204–208), while in the absolute sense it is used for someone pining away in sickness (*Od.* 5, 396). Plato uses the verb in this sense with σῶμα (*resp.* 609C) and σάρξ (*Tim.* 82E). The composite ἐκτήκω is mostly used for pining and crying. This explains why at II, 1, 12, 55 consumption results from tears, whereas the association with sickness may suit better II, 1, 12, 577, where flesh is consumed by night-vigils. A similar expression is used by Theodoret: Τοιούτοις δὲ πόνοις κατατήκων τὸ σῶμα (*hist. rel.* 17, 7). At II, 1, 13, 109, the participle τετρυμένον sums up many elements of ascetic life, since in Greek one can be τετρυμένος by tears (*Anth. Gr.* 9, 549), by the sun (Herodt. 6, 12), by toils (Plat. *leg.* 761D), by poverty (*Anth. Gr.* 7, 336) and, most of all, by old age (*Anth. Gr.* 6, 228; 7, 336), which is mentioned at II, 1, 13, 109.

269 On Hellenius see: Jones/Martindale/Morris 1971, 413, *s.v.* "Hellenius 1". Notable in Gregory's poem are these expressions: Ὧν οἱ μὲν σπήλυγξιν ἐρημαίαις τε χαμεύναις / Τέρπονται σχεδίοις, καὶ στυγέουσι δόμους, / Καὶ πτολίων φεύγουσιν ὁμήγυριν … Ἄλλοι δ' αὖ θήρεσσιν ὁμοίϊα δώμασι τυτθοῖς / Εἰρχθέντες, βροτέης οὐδ' ὀπὸς ἠντίασαν. (II, 2, 1, 55–57; 61–62; retreat from civilised life, but also sleeping on the ground); Οἱ δὲ σιδηρείῃσιν ἀλυκτοπέδαις μογέουσι, / Τήκοντες κακίην σὺν χοῖ τηκομένῳ (59–60; self-chaining and consuming of flesh); Καί πού τις λυκάβαντας ὅλους ἱερῷ ἐνὶ χώρῳ / Ἑστηὼς, καθαρὰς ἐξεπέτασσε χέρας· / Οὐδ' ὅγ' ἐπὶ βλεφάροισιν ὕπνον βάλε, θάμβος ἄπιστον! / Ἀλλ' ἐπάγη Χριστῷ, ἔμπνοος ὥστε λίθος. (69–72; privation of sleep and unnatural positions for protracted times, like the stylites).

270 McLynn 2012, 183–185.

271 Gautier 2002, 103n2; McLynn 2012, 180–183. Additional bibliography on the poem: McLynn 2012, 178n1. Lines 85–114 are particularly problematic, because it is not clear whether or in which measure Gregory is endorsing ascetic practices which bring the monk near to or even directly to death (cf. Αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα, νόμου τις ἀπηνέος ἐν μεσάτοισι / Μνήσατο, καὶ τοῖον ἐξερέεινεν ἔπος, / Εἰ καλὸν εὐσεβέεσσι Θεοῦ πέρι πότμον ἐπισπεῖν, / Ἔλκων κρυπταδίοις ῥήμασι πικρὸν ἔπος. / Εἰ δ' ὅγ' ἀϊδρείῃσιν ἐπαινήσειε τελευτήν· / Θνήσκουσιν πολλοῖς προφρονέως θανάτοις· / Αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ σφετέρης παλάμης, καὶ

seems to be little room for disapproval in Gregory's words about these extreme ascetics, whether or not they were present at Nazianzus. This means that Gregory is not so opposed to the practices of Syrian monasticism as Gautier often makes him to be; the poet even admits an exercise like the self-chaining into his portrait of the ascetic worthy of the episcopate.

3.2.2.2 Ascetic attitudes

An important concept underlying these practices is separation from the world. The concept is played out in a variety of directions in these passages. For example, it is implicit in the description of fasting as "exile of thought from the crass" (νοῦ . . . ἐκ πάχους ἐκδημίαις, II, 1, 12, 579)[272]. More importantly, it is the main reason behind Gregory's insistence on a poor life: poverty is ubiquitous in these portraits, either through the use of terms derived from στένος, "scarce", or through more elaborated passages[273]. At II, 1, 12, 595–597, for example, the metaphor of the ship is employed to convey three basic messages regarding poverty[274]. First, it links the portrait with Gregory's profile, since a stormy journey by ship triggered his ascetic profession, so that the man discharging the ship alludes to Gregory choosing poverty to avoid shipwreck. Second, the metaphor is denied (οὐ βυθῷ, 597) in order to stress that the renounced wealth should be given to the poor. In Ephrem's frequent calls to poverty, this detail was not touched upon and, moreover, was not so important among the tasks of the bishop. For Gregory, helping the poor seems more connected with the instantaneous renunciation of riches for the sake of the ascetic life than with a coordinated and consistent effort of the church led by the bishop. Finally, the metaphor implies—and the poet states—that the renouncing party was rich before renouncing: the richer one was to begin with, the more spectacular (and the more authoritative) is one's renunciation.[275] Therefore, this portrayal requires from the ideal ascetic that he be from a high-class background before giving himself to asceticism; and even this renunciation of riches for the poor could take on many different forms, not all equally spectacular and absolute[276]. The refusal of riches described at II, 1, 17, 25–32 is less of an ascetic choice than a refusal of

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γαστρὸς ἀνάγκῃ· / Οἱ δὲ κατὰ σκοπέλων, βένθεσί τ' ἠὲ βρόχοις, / Μάρτυρες ἀτρεκίης, πολέμου δ' ἄπο καὶ στονόεντος / Χαίρουσιν βιότου τοῦδ' ἀπανιστάμενοι, 95–104). This in a way parallels the problem posed by the expression τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν, treated here at n. 263.

272 Gautier 2002, 48–49.

273 For the use of στένος, see II, 1, 12, 55, 74, 590. The expression τὸ μὴ τρυφᾶν τρυφῶντα is a Cynic slogan: Dziech 1925, 9, 121–122 (especially n. 232).

274 On the metaphor: Rahner 1971, 239–564; Lorenz 1979; Kuhn 2014, 72–76. On its use in relation to wealth: Dziech 1925, 1962n98.

275 As deftly noted by Brown 1992, 75.

276 The theme is treated by Rapp 2005, 211–215.

corruption. Anyway, it is striking to note how much attention both Ephrem and Gregory devote to the theme of poverty, especially in leaders[277].

Separation from the world is not limited to separation from material wealth, for Gregory stresses more than once that the ascetic should part also from "social" goods. First and foremost, the ascetic should renounce δόξα, glory or renown, and, correspondingly, also ambitions (ἐλπίδας), especially towards positions of power (μεγάλων θώκων)[278]. At II, 1, 12, 73, Gregory says that the ascetic has even relinquished education and culture, the λόγοι he himself holds so dear in his writings. One might think that these expressions of refusal of higher offices and of culture imply adherence to an Egyptian model of monasticism, whereby the ascetic seeks to isolate himself from civil society and avoids enrolment in the secular clergy.

This attitude seems confirmed by II, 1, 12, 598–599, where Gregory describes the ascetic as running away (φυγών) from social life (πόλεις) and from the "storm" (ζάλη) of political life[279]. These lines move forward the metaphor of the ship in the sea: the man is the ship, his wealth the shipment, public life the stormy sea, God the safe haven in which the ascetic's mind will dock (Τοῦ νοῦ τὸ κάλλος τῷ Θεῷ προσήρμοσεν, 600). The imagery is also a common thread in our poems in reference to Gregory's retreat from Constantinople[280]. A similar function, albeit with slightly different connotations, can be attributed to two biblical images: Noah's ark (II, 1, 13, 205–207) and Jonah's three-day stay in the belly of the fish (II, 1, 17, 52–54), both of which imply the metaphor of public life as a storm (the flood or the storm that hit Jonah's ship), but which bear different connotations in relation to Gregory's retreat. In fact, the ark has the same value as the idea of God as a safe haven, representing Gregory's retreat as a search for protection. Jonah's image implies that Gregory was used as a scapegoat by the other bishop and that his retreat was willing but not desired.

However, note the difference in context: these passages defend Gregory's choice to resign and retreat as ascetic; thereby, he tries to restore the authority he lost as church leader in the form of ascetic authority. II, 1, 12, 598–599, on the other hand, refers to the ascetic as unjustly subjected to a worldly bishop. This may refer to Gregory's status as inferior in rank to Nectarius, even though Nectarius had no direct jurisdiction on Gregory and certainly was not Gregory's bishop, since Gregory lived in Nazianzus. On the other hand, the structure of the passage strongly implies that the two portraits (the

277 Poverty features prominently in the portrait of the apostles aimed at dispelling the idea that the apostles' low rank and culture justifies ignorant bishops (see §3.1.3.3): Δός μοι τὸ πιστὸν τῶν ἀποστόλων ἑνὸς, / Ἄχαλκον εἶναι, πῆραν οὐκ ἐξημμένον, / Ἄραβδον, ἡμίγυμνον, ὡς δ' ἀσάνδαλον, / Ἐφήμερον, πλουτοῦντα ἐλπίδας μόνας, / Μηδ' εὐπροσήγορόν τιν' εἰς δόξαν λόγου, / Τοῦ μὴ δοκεῖν θωπείαν ἰσχύειν πλέον, / Μηδ' ἀσχολεῖσθαι πρὸς λόγους ἀλλοτρίους. (II, 1, 12, 199–205).

278 Ῥίψαντα δόξαν, κτῆσιν, ἐλπίδας (II, 1, 12, 73); Οὐδ' ὅ γ' ἐπιστρέφεται πλούτου μεγάλων τε θοώκων, / Οὐ δόξης βροτέης ἐνθάδε συρομένης (II, 1, 17, 29–30).

279 Οὗτος φυγὼν πόλεις τε καὶ δήμων κρότους, / Καὶ τὴν ζάλην, ἢ πάντα τὰν μέσῳ στρέφει, (II, 1, 12, 598–599).

280 See II, 1, 10, 29–32; II, 1, 12, 792–795; II, 1, 13, 209–211.

ascetic and the worldly man) are intended as two models of ecclesiastical leadership: therefore, II, 1, 12, 598–599 proposes retreat *before* the taking of office, whereas the other passages present it as taking place *after* the ascetic has left office. Does this mean that Gregory was vying for a reelection? This is unrealistic, although not entirely impossible. After all, his choice not to take the task of bishop of Nazianzus after his resignation from Constantinople might not have been due only to a desire for retreat and ascesis, and maybe it concealed Gregory's hope of being elected to some other and more important see[281]. Yet I find it better to interpret this common imagery as signalling more general concepts. First, although the ascetic portrait is clearly meant also as a criticism to Nectarius and a self-defence, the poet is still speaking in general terms, so that his reflections are of general value and do not need to conform in every detail to Gregory's situation. Second, even though the different contexts in which the image occurs seem to imply different times for ascetic flight from the world, they do not explicitly exclude each other. On the contrary, it is entirely consistent with Gregory's own experience and ideas that retreat be not just one phase in the formation of a church leader, but rather should recur more than once in a lifetime, alternating with active duty. Therefore, as the rich man forsook wealth and world in his forming years, he can also forsake his ecclesiastical position to retreat in later days, and, in general, he should experience retreat and renunciation before each new appointment in the church[282]. Third, as noted, the ascetic portrait of II, 1, 12, 576–609 does not explicitly refer to a candidate for the episcopate. The argument is more like this: asceticism (whereof a part is fleeing from the world) commands spiritual authority even outside of ordained ministry; for this reason, it would be absurd if ordained ministry, which has the right and duty to govern even the ascetics, were to be completely nonascetic; therefore, in order to guide his whole community, the bishop should have the spiritual authority only an ascetic lifestyle can lend. It does not follow that *every* ascetic should also be a candidate for episcopate. In the end, Gregory's representation of himself, in II, 1, 12, 576–609, in the same terms with which he portrays the ascetic need not imply that he is presenting himself for any concrete position as bishop: he is restoring his spiritual authority in a more general sense; he is presenting himself as a reliable counsellor in spiritual matters; he is objecting to Nectarius's election and defending his own appointment in retrospect; and finally, he is offering a general rule for episcopal appointments.

The idea of renunciation of worldly matters is also expressed as a "closing" or "binding" of the senses (II, 1, 12, 62–63; 607). In the first case (62–63), the image refers to the bad man's failure to curtail his earthly pleasures: Meier rightly connects the metaphor of the bolts (κλεῖθρα) to be applied to the senses to analogous metaphors used elsewhere in relation to single parts of the body to signify renunciation[283]. This inter-

281 McGuckin 2001a, 384–386.

282 Gautier 2002, 107.

283 Meier 1989, 82 *ad* l. 63, with a reference to Zehles/Zamora 1996, 66–67 (commenting Greg. Naz. I, 2, 2, 76–77). In that case, the part of the body in question are the ears, which are to be shielded from dam-

pretation is confirmed by the other image employed—that of a racing horse (πῶλος) without reins (ἡνία)—because of its Platonic echoes[284]. Line 607 (Καὶ συνδέων αἴσθησιν αὐτῷ τὴν πλάνον) comes after the mention of self-enchainment (603–606), and the participle συνδέων describes one of the aims of that practice. This is again a moral limitation on earthly pleasure: the senses (αἴσθησις) are "wandering" (πλάνος), as was the "colt without reins" in 63; the chains are used to keep them still (συνδέων); and the overall idea is to prevent the ascetic from sinning for the sake of his sensual appetites. The ascetic strives to distance his interest and his thoughts from material things, an aim described at II, 1, 12, 71 as "sitting above visible things" (ἄνω καθήμενον τῶν ὁρωμένων) and, in more forceful terms, at II, 1, 17, 25–26 as "cleaving the spirit from earthly things (κεάζειν / θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων)[285].

Gregory synthesises the meaning of asceticism, of fleeing the world and separating the mind from the senses, in the expression κόσμον ἀτιμάζοντα (II, 1, 13, 110). Asceticism, therefore, strives towards a new relationship with the κόσμος, one of superiority and carelessness. Superiority and carelessness touch different levels of reality, because the word κόσμος embraces both the physical and the social sphere, expressing every system of realities separated from (and sometimes antagonistic to) God[286]. The poet has stressed in these ascetic portraits the "outsider" quality of the ascetic, his otherness from the logic of the social and material world: Gautier rightly identified this concept under the heading of ξενιτεία, "living abroad", as the central feature of Gregorian ascesis; and, it must be noted, separation from the world is the basis both of the desert ideology of Egyptian anchorites and the almost militaristic conception of Syrian

aging words (see also II, 1, 45, 15), but the following lines (I, 2, 2, 78–81) apply similar imagery of binding and closing to the eyes and the mouth (Ὄμματα δ' ἐν νυμφῶσι τεοῖς βλεφάροισιν ἐρύχθω, 78; Χείλεα … δέσμια κείσθω, 80). The mouth is the privileged object of this imagery, on the basis of Ps. 140:3: II, 1, 34A, 11; *or*. 6, 1; 12, 1; *ep*. 118, 1; Kuhn 2014, 85–86.

284 Plat. *Phaedr.* 246A-257B, the famous myth of the chariot of the soul. See also the Homeric simile at *Il.* 6, 506–511. For the image in Gregory see: Kuhn 2014, 55–60. Note that Ephrem used the image of the reins (*pgūdē*) to express the same idea of dominating youth through asceticism at *CN* 15, 5, 5.

285 A more epistemological turn is given to the image at *or.* 2, 7 (again describing ascetic life): Οὐδὲν γὰρ ἐδόκει μοι τοιοῦτον οἷον μύσαντα τὰς αἰσθήσεις, ἔξω σαρκὸς καὶ κόσμου γενόμενον, εἰς ἑαυτὸν συστραφέντα, μηδενὸς τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων προσαπτόμενον, ὅτι μὴ πᾶσα ἀνάγκη, ἑαυτῷ προσλαλοῦντα καὶ τῷ Θεῷ, ζῆν ὑπὲρ τὰ ὁρώμενα, καὶ τὰς θείας ἐμφάσεις ἀεὶ καθαρὰς ἐν ἑαυτῷ φέρειν ἀμιγεῖς τῶν κάτω χαρακτήρων καὶ πλανωμένων, ὄντως ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον Θεοῦ καὶ τῶν θείων καὶ ὂν καὶ ἀεὶ γινόμενον, φωτὶ προσλαμβάνοντα φῶς, καὶ ἀμαυροτέρῳ τρανότερον, ἤδη τὸ τοῦ μέλλοντος αἰῶνος ἀγαθὸν ταῖς ἐλπίσι καρπούμενον, καὶ συμπεριπολεῖν ἀγγέλοις, ἔτι ὑπὲρ γῆς ὄντα καταλιπόντα τὴν γῆν, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος ἄνω τιθέμενον. This passage parallels most themes touched in the ascetic portrayals of the poems: beside shutting the senses, there is the flight from the world and flesh, the direct relationship with God, the iconographic concept of "characters" imprinted from above and the ascetic as mirror reflecting God, the *vita angelica* and the apocalyptic anticipation.

286 Lampe 1961, 771, *s.v.* κόσμος.

urban asceticism[287]. However, in contrast with Gautier's analysis, our texts seem not to provide the counterbalance of charity to the isolationist tendency of the ascetic that should imprint Gregory's engaged asceticism: not only does the poet defend extreme practices such as flight from the cities and self-enchainment or even renunciation of the λόγοι, but the poems lack the typical discussion of mixed life as a synthesis between *vita contemplativa* and *vita activa*[288]. The only passage approaching these themes is II, 1, 12, 709–720, but it attributes all good to the contemplative and stresses the immorality of political life, thereby reinforcing the ideal of an isolated ascetic (§2.2.3.2).

However, even if the mixed life is not directly thematised, the portraits of II, 1, 13 and of II, 1, 17 strongly imply the idea of a priest-ascetic, mixing contemplative and active life. The ideal candidate for the episcopate has "sweated in the thrones"—that is, has had experience in ecclesiastical affairs (ἐνιδρώσαντα θρόνοισι, II, 1, 13, 108); he is a priest (θυηπόλον ἐσθλὸν Ἄνακτος, II, 1, 13, 111) and is surrounded by other people (Ἀνθρώπων δ' ἀγαθοῖσι διδοῖ φρένα, τοῖς δὲ κακοῖσι / Κάμπτεται, ὅσσα λίθος ὀκρυόεις ἀδάμας, II, 1, 17, 27–28). Here, incidentally, we find a similarity with Ephrem's stress on the bishop's management of advice and information in the community in *CN* 21, 10; 12–13 (§3.1.4.3). These characteristics are just as apt to describe Gregory as the more ascetic ones: in referring to the "old man who sweated in the thrones" and who could not bring himself to consent with bad people, the poet clearly means himself, being old, having been bishop in Nazianzus and in Constantinople and having resisted Maximus before that and the party of Diodore and Flavian afterward. He is the weak one jostled out from the chancel by the ἄλκιμος Nectarius (II, 1, 13, 107).

Only II, 1, 12 is totally skewed towards the contemplative side. This may be due to the context in which the two portrayals are inserted and the point of Gregory's argument: in both cases he is contrasting his *curriculum* with that of Nectarius, so that he may have wanted to stress the contemplative side of the mixed life, since the active was in common with the other figure. Indeed, Gregory does not reject λόγοι and civic life so flatly when he is arguing against the uncouth Cynic Maximus[289]. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that both portrayals in II, 1, 12 compare the ascetic to the secular in order to bring out an injustice: the passage at 54–75 complains about the immortal theme of the misery of the just man and the triumphs of the wicked, whereas lines 570–633 argue that it is absurd that a worldly man should be the leader in matters of religion to an ascetic. Granted, the poet wants us to understand that such a man as the

287 On ξενιτεία: Gautier 2002, 9–16 (ξενιτεία before Gregory); 69–77 (in Gregory). On the Egyptian desert: Rapp 2005, 105–125. On Syrian monastic *ethos*: Vööbus 1958, 86–90. In Syrian asceticism in particular, the ascetic signals his separation from the world not through displacement from the city, but through virginity; much more than the Egyptian anchorite, the *bnay qyama* thought of themselves as waging an apocalyptic war against the present world, hence their engagement in communal life, which did not contradict their separation from the world itself.

288 Gautier 2002, 52–53, 56–69; the most dramatic representation of this discussion is II, 1, 11, 277–311.

289 See also Meier 1989, 135.

ascetic of 576–609 would be the better bishop, but, as I already said, not every ascetic needs to be a bishop[290].

3.2.2.3 Ascetic aims

Separation from the world, important as it is, constitutes only the *pars destruens*, so to speak, of asceticism. One wants to liberate oneself from the flesh, but what for? The attention of the Gregorian ascetic goes in three main directions: the end of times, Scripture, and God. Contemplation of the ἔσχατον assumes different forms, combining the philosophical exercise of meditation on death with the apocalyptic awareness of Syrian Christianity. Death is clearly linked with separation from the world, but Gregory introduces Christian content in this intuition—for example, by connecting death and separation from the world to angelic life or the hope in the resurrection. Apart from the already discussed τὸ θνήσκειν μνώμενος καθ' ἡμέραν, which connects death, fasting, and angelic life (II, 1, 12, 592–594), there is the topos of the ascetic as living dead (II, 1, 13, 111) and the Pauline expression ποθῶν λαβεῖν ἔνδυμα τὴν ἀφθαρσίαν (II, 1, 12, 591). This is laden with cultural implications: "incorruption" (ἀφθαρσία) is not only the term defining eternal life; it also defines virginity in early Syrian asceticism[291]. The idea of "putting on" Christ or incorruption as a dress, though already in Paul, was very prominent in Syrian Christianity, but it was also extensively analysed by Origen as an eschatological formula[292]. However, the ascetic contemplating death and the end is also brought to reflect on God's judgement and on his own sin: hence the reference to repentance and to the deep stress and preoccupation over the salvation of one's soul (see II, 1, 12, 48–53; 58). The theme emerges only at the beginning of II, 1, 12, because it highlights the injustice of having the anxious and depressed penitent pursued by misfortune while the wicked enjoys life without remorse; yet, before this contrast, Gregory had hinted at the last judgement. The other ascetic portrayals do not refer directly to the judgement, and, moreover, they tend to highlight the peace of mind and detachment of the ascetic in contrast with the many cares of the man in the world (see II, 1, 12, 611–613).

Regarding meditation on Scriptures, Gregory seems to distinguish two phases: in II, 1, 12, 57 he lists biblical study among the activities consuming the mind and body of the

290 Finally, even if it forms a comprehensive description of Gregory's ascetic ideal, the passage at 576–609 is punctuated by the anaphora of οὗτος (576; 595; 598; 602; 608), which may signal different hypothetical ascetics portrayed in the description (Meier 1989, 135). This construction is well grounded in grammar and has a parallel at II, 2, 1, 55–84, where Gregory lists a series of ascetics with their achievements. However, the listing at II, 2, 1 is much more varied than our anaphora of οὗτος. Furthermore, I find the entire passage at II, 1, 12, 576–609 too internally coherent to be split in a series of portrayals of different ascetics. The anaphora of οὗτος may in fact be referred to the same subject, as per Kühner/Gerth 1898, §467.

291 Vööbus 1958, 86–87.

292 Syriac Christianity: Brock 1992, 32–33, 39, 42, 46–48, 60–66, 85–97, 107. Origen: Noce 2002; cf. Orig. *princ.* 2, 3, 2–3; *c. Cels*. 7, 32.

ascetic; on the other hand, in II, 1, 12, 608–609, he presents understanding of Scripture as a revelation of the Holy Spirit given to the ascetic. This double facet is to be explained with the idea that correct speculation, and in particular correct interpretation of Scripture, cannot be attained without a moral purification of the person. Bible study is at the same time an instrument of purification among the other, more practical, exercises, and is the aim of asceticism[293]. Therefore, this whole description of asceticism finally ties into the educational program already discussed in §3.1.3.3: Christian learning has to be conceived primarily as biblical hermeneutics. It may be unadorned and "ascetic" in style, but it must be rich in contents. Correct hermeneutics is a gift of the Spirit, so that the recipient should purify himself only through asceticism (of which study is just one aspect). As was noted above for Gregory's educational program, his ascetic program, as well, is deeply influenced by Origen, maybe not in the concrete practices—which reflect a Syrian milieu—but certainly in its aims, involving a deep engagement with Scripture[294].

Finally, the ascetic is said to have direct contact with God. The theme is repeated in almost the same terms in each portrayal. These passages are also very similar to the definition of priesthood in II, 1, 12, 751–760 and to Gregory's description of his activity of "spiritual priesthood" in retreat (II, 1, 10, 31–34; II, 1, 12, 803–808; II, 1, 13, 209–215; II, 1, 17, 101–102)[295]. In this case, Gregory's technique of rewriting, with slight variations, a common theme across different works seems to be laden with meaning: the poet strongly suggests that the activity of the ascetic and of the priest is the same, with the difference that the priest has to communicate his activity to others; moreover, it seems clear that, once this identity between ascetic and priest has been established, Gregory casts himself as the ideal example of this general portrait. This goes in the same direction as his treatment of biblical learning, since in that case too he required from the bishops a particular kind of learning, which he then attributed to the ascetic. Therefore, parallels and variations on the same theme serve to further the idea that the ideal requisites for the episcopacy are found and fostered in the asceticism Gregory champions. If Gregory avoids too direct a statement on this, perhaps to avoid falling into Encratite positions such as those condemned at Gangra.

As to the contents of this meditation on God, three facets may be highlighted: the organ of meditation, the imagery of "ascent," and that of "touching" God. In all pas-

293 Gautier 2002, 120–121, 169, 172.

294 For Origen the exegete is as inspired by the Holy Spirit as was the sacred writer in the first place: Orig. *in Mt. comm.* 14, 6; *princ.* 2, 7, 2; *quo modo opus prophetarum erat haec spiritu praedicere quae videbantur, sic eodem spiritu opus est ei qui exponere cupit ea quae sunt latenter significata* (*in Hes. hom.* 2, 2). Jerome, who translated in Latin the quoted homily by Origen and who claimed to have studied under Gregory, continues this line of thought: *nullus melior typi sui interpres erit, quam ipse qui inspiravit prophetas et futurae veritatis in servis suis lineas ante signavit* (Hieron. *in Ion. praef.* 72–74).

295 Besides II, 1, 17, 25–40, which can be read as the portrait of a perfect bishop as well as of an ascetic, the main differences of the passages on Gregory and on priesthood from the ascetic portraits are the themes of sacrifice (see §3.1.2; §2.1.3.1) and of retreat.

sages (including those on priesthood and on Gregory's retreat), the organ that meditates on and eventually reaches God is the νοῦς. The generalised use of this word and the avoidance of the term ψυχή in this context cannot be coincidental: the poet is implicitly adopting a tripartite structure of the human being, in which the mental faculties are topped by an *apex mentis*, a part or faculty of the mind capable of making contact with the Godhead, namely νοῦς. It is a Neoplatonic idea found also in Origen as an exegesis of Pauline expressions such as "inner man" or "new man"[296]. Iambic passages employ only the word νοῦς and derivatives, whereas in dactylic verses Gregory employs, besides νοῦς, other terms stemming from the epic tradition: θυμός (II, 1, 10, 33; II, 1, 17, 26) and πραπίδες (II, 1, 13, 212; II, 1, 17, 37). Θυμός is the organ rising above material things, and, considering the parallelism between II, 1, 10, 33 and II, 1, 17, 35, Gregory seems to mean θυμός as a synonym for νοῦς[297]. The word πραπίδες, on the other side, has a very specific meaning, since πραπίδες are always mentioned in connection with the "recording" of mystical experiences in the ascetic's mind, so that this must be a poetic term for memory[298].

296 Plot. *enn.* 5, 3, 3; Orig. *princ.* 4, 4, 9. Origen and Plotinus share the conviction that man contains something capable of reaching the divine; they both call it νοῦς (among other names); they both see it as something more primordial and original than the ψυχή and the body, which are later additions concealing this kernel (see: Plot. *enn.* 6, 4, 14; Orig. *in Joh. comm.* 20, 22, 183); therefore, they both see the approach to the One or God as a "returning". For the difference of these two models, see Dupuis 1967, 62–65 (for Plotinus the divine is in the soul as an intellectual faculty, for Origen the νοῦς is capable of receiving the divine, but it is not the same as God; participation is mechanical and obtained through reason in Plotinus, founded on Grace and eschatological in Origen; the primacy of νοῦς in Plotinus is ontological, whereas in Origen is also chronological or historical). Gregory's position vis-à-vis these thinkers entails the concepts of θέωσις or οἰκείωσις τῷ θεῷ, his anthropology and the question of the man "made in God's image", all themes deeply studied, and which is not necessary to rehearse here. For some discussions, see Holl 1904, 161–164; Girardi 2001; Russell 2006, 215–225; Maslov 2012a; Maslov 2012b; Elm 2012, 259–265, 413–422.

297 Ἔνθα νόου καθαροῖσι νοήμασι θυμὸν ἀείρων (II, 1, 10, 33); ἀλλὰ νόον καθαροῖσι νοήμασιν αἰὲν ἀέξων (II, 1, 17, 35). See also: θυμὸν ἀπὸ χθονίων ἔνθεν ἀνιστάμενος (II, 1, 17, 26). Locating in the θυμός the higher faculties, Gregory is employing the Homeric sense of the word, as opposed to later usage, which tends to ascribe to θυμός emotions and appetites.

298 Αἰεί τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσων (II, 1, 13, 212); ἧς [*scil.* Τριάδος] τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῆισι (II, 1, 17, 37). After Homer, πραπίς and πραπίδες were taken as synonyms of φρήν and φρένες, and their range of meanings reduced to intellectual activity, whereas in Homer the term has still a physical sense and an emotional one, while its relationship with φρένες is hard to ascertain (Sullivan 1987). The idea of memory here is conveyed more by the expressions χαράσσων and τύπον, which echo the common idea of memory as a writing support (cf.: δυνάμει δ' οὕτως ὥσπερ ἐν γραμματείῳ ᾧ μηθὲν ἐνυπάρχει ἐντελεχείᾳ γεγραμμένον, Aristot. *an.* 429B 29–430A 1; Τὴν δὲ φαντασίαν εἶναι τύπωσιν ἐν ψυχῇ, τοῦ ὀνόματος οἰκείως μετενηνεγμένου ἀπὸ τῶν τύπων <τῶν> ἐν τῷ κηρῷ ὑπὸ τοῦ δακτυλίου γινομένων. Zeno *apud* Diog. L. 7, 45). The use of πραπίδες may also be a Homeric rewriting of biblical phraseology: ἐπίγραψον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ πλάτος τῆς καρδίας σου (Prov. 7:3); φανερούμενοι ὅτι ἐστὲ ἐπιστολὴ Χριστοῦ διακονηθεῖσα ὑφ' ἡμῶν, ἐγγεγραμμένη οὐ μέλανι ἀλλὰ πνεύματι θεοῦ ζῶντος, οὐκ ἐν πλαξὶν λιθίναις ἀλλ' ἐν πλαξὶν καρδίαις σαρκίναις (2Cor. 3:3); διδοὺς νόμους μου ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτούς (Jer. 38:33; Hebr. 8:10; 10:16; cf. Jer. 17:1).

Two images define meditation in Gregory's texts—namely, elevation or ascent and touching. Trisoglio has already studied the theme of elevation or ascent in Gregory's spirituality[299]. It is a piece of imagery so widespread in our culture and in the ancient one that it is almost taken for granted. Indeed, it is shared among Gregory's main models for these passages: the Platonic literature, the Bible, and Origen[300]. In the passages on Gregory's retreat, the ascending movement is paired with an introverted movement of the νοῦς: Ὣν ὅδε δεσμὸς ἔχει πλάγκτην νόον ἔνδον ἀγείρας, / Εἴσω πᾶς ὀρόων (II, 1, 13, 209–210). God is looked for with an inward movement, which is also a unifying movement, whereas the normal activity of the intellect is outward and sparse (πλάγκτην). Introspection and unity are not only the basis of Plotinian meditation[301] but also metaphysical categories which describe the activity of the second hypostasis, the νοῦς[302]. In other words, Gregory frames his retreat from politics as the Neoplatonic "conversion" (ἐπιστροφή) of the Soul to its principle, Mind, and of Mind to its principle, the One. The dialectic between "conversion" (ἐπιστροφή) and "procession" (πρόοδος) of the hypostases (which has a Christian counterpart in the call to conversion and in the Son's condescension through incarnation) is imitated by the ascetic-bishop, oscillating between activity and retreat. Through this analogy between Godhead and philosopher, retreat and ascent become the same movement.

The metaphor of touch for mystical contact with the divinity is another commonplace: the sense of touch is the less mediated of the senses, and as such, it expresses the

299 Trisoglio 1990. In our poems: II, 1, 12, 71; 579; II, 1, 13, 109; II, 1, 17, 26; 35–36. See also II, 1, 10, 33 and II, 1, 12, 753.

300 As regards Platonism, ideas of ascent in relation to philosophical progress are scattered all through the *Phaedrus* (for example: τελέα μὲν οὖν οὖσα [*scil.* ἡ ψυχή] καὶ ἐπτερωμένη μετεωροπορεῖ, Plat. *Phaedr.* 246C; ἄκραν ἐπὶ τὴν ὑπουράνιον ἀψῖδα πορεύονται [οἱ θεοί] πρὸς ἄναντες, 247B; τῇδέ τις ὁρῶν κάλλος, τοῦ ἀληθοῦς ἀναμιμνῃσκόμενος, πτερῶταί τε καὶ ἀναπτερούμενος προθυμούμενος ἀναπτέσθαι, ἀδυνατῶν δέ, ὄρνιθος δίκην βλέπων ἄνω, τῶν κάτω δὲ ἀμελῶν, 249D) and are also prominent in Plotinus (for example: Τὰ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ ἐνεργήματα ἄνωθεν οὕτως, ὡς τὰ ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως κάτωθεν, τοῦτο ὄντες τὸ κύριον τῆς ψυχῆς, μέσον δυνάμεως διττῆς, χείρονος καὶ βελτίονος, χείρονος μὲν τῆς αἰσθήσεως, βελτίονος δὲ τοῦ νοῦ, Plot. *enn.* 5, 3, 3). In the Bible, God is frequently visualised in heaven or on high (1Reg. 8:27; Ps. 10:4; Jes. 57:15; 66:1; Mt. 5:34; Lc. 2:14), visions may entail the prophet ascending to heaven (Hes. 8:3; 11:24; 2Cor. 12:2) and Jesus himself says that one must be "born from above (ἄνωθεν)" to "see" the Kingdom of God (Joh. 3:3). As for Origen, a relevant passage is *in Joh. comm.* 19, 20, 130–134.

301 E.g.: Δεῖ τοίνυν, εἰ τῶν οὕτω παρόντων ἀντίληψις ἔσται, καὶ τὸ ἀντιλαμβανόμενον εἰς τὸ εἴσω ἐπιστρέφειν, κἀκεῖ ποιεῖν τὴν προσοχὴν ἔχειν (Plot. *enn.* 5, 1, 12); εἰς ἓν αὐτῷ ἐλθὼν, καὶ μηκέτι σχίσας ἓν ὁμοῦ πάντα ἐστὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τοῦ θεοῦ ἀψοφητὶ παρόντος, καὶ ἔστι μετ' αὐτοῦ ὅσον δύναται καὶ θέλει (8, 11); πάντων τῶν ἔξω ἀφεμένην δεῖ ἐπιστραφῆναι πρὸς τὸ εἴσω πάντη, μὴ πρός τι τῶν ἔξω κεκλίσθαι, ἀλλὰ ἀγνοήσαντα τὰ πάντα, (6, 9, 7).

302 Εἰκόνα δὲ ἐκείνου λέγομεν εἶναι τὸν νοῦν· δεῖ γὰρ σαφέστερον λέγειν· πρῶτον μέν, ὅτι δεῖ πως εἶναι ἐκεῖνο τὸ γενόμενον καὶ ἀποσῴζειν πολλὰ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶναι ὁμοιότητα πρὸς αὐτό, ὥσπερ καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦ ἡλίου. Ἀλλ' οὐ νοῦς ἐκεῖνο. Πῶς οὖν νοῦν γεννᾷ; Ἢ ὅτι τῇ ἐπιστροφῇ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἑώρα· ἡ δὲ ὅρασις αὕτη νοῦς (Plot. *enn.* 5, 1, 7).

intimate relationship of the mystic mind with God[303]. Aristotle discusses the sense of touch in *an.* 422b 17–424a 16 and mentions it elsewhere in his biological opus, noting the difficulties this sense poses for his model of sensation passing through a material medium; in effect, in the sense of touch, medium and sensory organ tend to coincide, and the medium is subject to substantial changes from the object of sensation (contrarily to what happens to all other senses), acquiring some of its properties. Moreover, for Aristotle, the sense of touch is the most primal and basic of all senses, the one without which there can be no sense—and therefore no animal—at all[304]. In fact, where Gregory does not use this image, he employs other words, κοινονέω and μίγνυμι, expressing not only a direct contact but also a mutual action of the agents, a "coming together"[305].

The last ideological component of Gregory's portrait of the ascetic brings both this idea of "coming together" with the Godhead and the practices described to fruition: the ascetic bears the marks of his spiritual progress. This is true not only on the spiritual level, as we have seen the ascetic storing up God's τύπος in his πραπίδες, but also on a physical level, as the practices of asceticism mould and mark (again with the word τύπος) the ascetic's body[306]. The insistence on the marks of asceticism, be they physical or spiritual, is a striking similarity with Ephrem's idea of the *ṭupsā* (i.e., τύπος) of poverty. Granted, Ephrem develops the image in another direction, towards a sort of biblical typology applied to episcopal succession, but the poets share the same approach to ascetic models in visual or iconographic terms. On one side, this approach may be connected with their insistence on the value of example; on the other, I take it to be influenced by the rising devotion to living ascetics. As Bacci has noted, inspecting ascetics was a religious practice of increasing importance in late antiquity, whereby pilgrims visited monks, eager to see their bodies unpleasantly marked by extreme feats of asceticism. The sight alone of these "living icons and statues of virtue", as Theodoret calls them, was deemed sufficient to transmit a spiritual benefit or a vague idea of the resurrected body[307]. Now, as we have seen (§2.2.3.2), the same idea is applied by Gregory to the bishop as church leader: he too must acquire the marks of God in his soul to radiate and mediate them to the community, in order to effect their salvation. The same acquiring of "marks" is used by Gregory to refer to himself in II, 1, 13, 212 (αἰεί τε πραπίδεσσι νοήματα θεῖα χαράσσων). As in the case of biblical proficiency, the self-portrait, the ascetic ideal, and the model

303 See: II, 1, 17, 39. Cf. Plotinus: ἵνα τῷ ὅλῳ αὐτῶν περιπτυξώμεθα καὶ μηδὲν μέρος ἔχοιμεν, ᾧ μὴ ἐφαπτόμεθα θεοῦ (*enn.* 6, 9, 9).

304 Steiner Goldner 2018.

305 See II, 1, 12, 72, 600–601.

306 Cf. τύποις τε σαρκῶν ἐσφράγισται τιμίοις (II, 1, 12, 586) with ἧς [*scil.* Τριάδος] τύπον ἐστήριξεν ἐνὶ πραπίδεσσιν ἐῆισι (II, 1, 17, 37). See also εἰκὼν μέν τις ἔγραψεν ἀπ'εἰκόνος ἀρχετύποιο, / στησάμενος προπάροιθε, πίναξ δ'ὑπεδέξατο μορφήν (II, 1, 13, 112–113).

307 οἷόν τινας εἰκόνας αὐτῶν ἐμψύχους καὶ στήλας σφᾶς αὐτοὺς πεποιήκασι (Theodrt. *hist. rel. praef.* 2); Διέμεινε δὲ μέχρι καὶ τήμερον τόδε τῆς πολιτείας τὸ εἶδος … ἀμφότεροι στῆλαί τινες ἔμψυχοι καὶ εἰκόνες τῆς ἀρετῆς τῆς ἐκείνου γενόμενοι (5, 6; note how the "way" of life of the monks is called a πολιτείας εἶδος, with a visual metaphor). See Bacci 2014, 69–72.

bishop tend to be formulated in the same terms. In this particular case, given the relative lack of precedents for the iconographic metaphor applied to the bishops, one could argue that both Ephrem and Gregory transported the metaphor from the cult of ascetics to bishops as they integrated ascetic values into their model of the bishop.

3.2.3 Conclusion

Summing up Gregory's and Ephrem's treatments of asceticism in relation to the episcopate, we could say that the two poets develop a common ideal of the ascetic-bishop along slightly different lines, according to their different interests. They both envisage the bishop as leading the ascetics, who are thought of as part of the community; in general, the poems do not address potential or actual conflicts between ascetic circles and the church hierarchy, but they tacitly imply such conflicts as an argument for a bishop having strong ascetic credentials, if not chosen from among the ascetics themselves. In fact, asceticism and church hierarchy are consistently lumped together, whether it be in Ephrem's description of the career of Valgash and in the idea of an ascetic succession bound up with the episcopal one, or in Gregory's (self-)portraits of the ideal ascetic, corresponding with the ideal bishop and the ideal candidate for the episcopate.

Ephrem and Gregory conceive of asceticism in the same Syrian tradition: the ascetic is part of the Christian community, is marked out by virginity and a heightened practice of Christian liturgies (fasts, wakes, prayers, interpretation of Scriptures), and is the perfect candidate for ordered ministry. They also strongly emphasise poverty, as a value that the bishops should bring to their ministry from an ascetic background. In the case of Ephrem, this emphasis can be placed, albeit with some difficulty, in the historical context of a community gaining back imperial favour after the times of Julian, thus risking becoming arrogant in its prosperity. In the case of Gregory, no precise historical occurrence seems to play a role, but perhaps no small part of the episcopal infighting that pestered his career must be attributed to greed.

Two major differences mark out Gregory's treatment of asceticism from Ephrem's. First, Gregory is much more cautious as regards virginity, a choice stemming from his position as son of a bishop and close ally of a married bishop (Gregory of Nyssa), and perhaps also from his taking into account the Synod of Gangra and the experience of Eustathius of Sebaste, whereas Ephrem is rooted in the strongly Encratitic tradition of the Syriac churches. Second, Gregory expresses his view of asceticism from within the Greek philosophical tradition, where Origen and Neoplatonism strongly influence his thought. Therefore, in Gregory we find descriptions of or references to contemplation and mysticism, which are totally absent from Ephrem. The Syrian poet sees asceticism as an ethical enterprise or as a striving for purity, and the insights the ascetic gains are limited to his ability to preach and interpret Scripture. In Gregory, on the other side, the Origenian model places biblical hermeneutics in a deeper metaphysics of the relation between God and man.

3.3 Who makes the bishops? Questions of episcopal selection

It is no surprise that our poets, concerned as they are with the behaviour of bishops, should also touch upon the theme of their selection. A number of different concerns and ideas crowd around the selection of candidates and the creation of the new bishop. The characteristics of the ideal candidate, in relation to his future tasks as prelate as well as to the hot topic of asceticism, have been already examined. The point of this section is to lay out the ideas and literary treatment of the formality of episcopal selection, not its material criteria: Who should make the choice? How should he or they decide? What exactly does the process of creating a new bishop, as represented in Gregory's and Ephrem's poems, entail? In practice, the great question, common to Ephrem and Gregory, is fitting together God and the community (or clergy) in the process of selection and legitimation of a bishop. One should not forget that this question agitated the church in the fourth century not only because of the frequent exiles and replacements of Arian and Nicene bishops, posing concrete problems of legitimacy, but also because of communities bearing radical understandings of the question, such as Donatists, Novatianists, Montanists, and Messalianists[308]. Despite the common theme, the two poets parse this process of selection differently, in accordance with their different interests at hand.

At first, I will confront the most glaring difference between the two poets—namely, the agency of the choice of a bishop (§3.3.1). Gregory attributes it to other bishops; Ephrem to God (§3.3.1.1). Then, I will consider the role of the people and of the predecessor in the selection and election process (§3.3.1.2). In the following section (§3.3.2), Gregory's position will be examined with a reading first of his more innovative poem, II, 1, 12 (§3.3.2.1), then of his vaguer call to improvement in the church in II, 1, 13 (§3.3.2.2). I will then compare the different stances and narrations in these two poems (§3.3.2.3), and finally sum up the results of this inquiry in the conclusion (§3.3).

3.3.1 Who chooses bishops? Divine choice and the need for consensus

According to canon law, the bishop was chosen by the community—with special weight placed on its clergy—and approved by the metropolitan and by the other bishops of the diocese. How this process precisely played out in the first centuries of Christianity, taking into account significant regional variations and encroachments by imperial authority, is difficult to determine, although scholarship has described tendencies, single cases, and overarching concerns[309]. Gregory's and Ephrem's approaches to the theme are considerably different.

308 On the exile of bishops, see Barry 2018; Hillner/Enberg/Ulrich 2016; Kopecek 1974.

309 Regarding episcopal selection, a first approach with further bibliography can be gleaned from: Gryson 1973; Gryson 1979; Norton 2007; Leemans/Van Nuffelen/Keough/Nicolaye 2011; Leppin 2016; Leppin 2017.

3.3.1.1 God and the bishops

Gregory writes with a clear conscience that bishops are coopted by the other bishops, for otherwise his deep concern with criteria of selection would be inconceivable: II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 address the bishops directly, criticizing the criteria adopted until now and proposing new ones[310]. Moreover, he takes for granted this process of co-optation, so that it is likely his interlocutors shared the same presupposition. Indeed, this is in accordance with the contemporary growth of the influence of bishops in the appointments and the decline in importance of the congregations[311]. Therefore, episcopal authority eschews, as regards the selection of the incumbent, the features of the charismatic type of authority, in which charisma is not conferred upon the incumbent, but is instead *found, discovered* in someone who, by virtue of this charisma, becomes an authority[312]. A different representation of the process is at work in Gregory's autobiographical narration: when he describes his call to Constantinople, Gregory attributes it to God, the Nicene community of the city, and other bishops[313]. This scheme is much more in line with canon law and also more flattering for the elected, since he can count on divine legitimation and popular consensus to defend his position; however, the fact remains that the bishops were still the most important agent, as demonstrated by the fact that sometimes the people are omitted (II, 1, 10, 15), and the agency of the Spirit is advanced with some doubt (Εἴτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ' ἁμαρτάδες, . . . Τὸ δ' οὖν πρόδηλον, σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων / Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, II, 1, 12, 79; 81–82). Granted, we should not take these propositions as theological stances, because they would be contradictory. Rather, the poet highlights a different component of a complex theological idea (i.e., the appointment of a new bishop) in view of his context, aim, and audience; therefore, it makes perfect sense that he would mention all components (God, bishops, and people), stressing divine intervention, when claiming legitimacy for his own episcopate before the same social components that would traditionally accept or refuse that legitimacy. When the poet advances to other bishops concrete criteria for the selection of candidates, on the other hand, there is no need to put forth all components; on

310 See: Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥᾳδίως καθίζομεν (II, 1, 12, 375); Τοῦτ' οὖν ὁρῶν ἔκαμνες εὑρεῖν ποιμένα; / Ὡς μικρὸν ἐσπούδαζες· ἐγκαλύπτομαι. / Ὥσπερ λογιστὴν ἐσκόπεις τὸν προστάτην. / Κόπρων μέλει σοι, μειζόνων δ' ἐμοὶ λόγος. (II, 1, 12, 747–750); Δεῦρ' ἴτε, δεξιτερῆσι νέους κλίνοιτε τένοντας / Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται. (II, 1, 13, 90–91); Ἡμεῖς δ' αὖ κακίῃ γέρα θήκαμεν (II, 1, 13, 194).

311 Gryson 1978, 342–345; Leppin 2016, 74–75; *contra* Norton 2007, 6–7, 30–34, 38–45.

312 Weber 1922, 145. Cf. Leppin 2017, 45–46 (Cyprian reflects the common notion that "elections" of bishops are not meant to balance the interests of the community, but to identify correctly God's will, as already theorised by Weber 1922, 143–144; Origen conceives of charisma separately from episcopal charges: hopefully the two can go hand in hand, but sometimes they will be at odds; see Orig. *in Lev. hom.* 6, 2; 6, 6).

313 θῶκον ἐπ' ἀλλότριον, / Οὗ με Θεός τ' ἐπέβησε, Θεοῦ τ' ἀγαθοὶ θεράποντες; (II, 1, 10, 14–15); ἔπεμψεν ἡμᾶς ἡ χάρις τοῦ πνεύματος / πολλῶν καλούντων ποιμένων καὶ θρεμμάτων (II, 1, 11, 595–596); Εἴτ' οὖν τὸ θεῖον Πνεῦμα, εἴθ' ἁμαρτάδες, / Ὡς ἂν δίκας τίσαιμι τῆς ἐπάρσεως· / Τὸ δ' οὖν πρόδηλον σύλλογοί τε ποιμένων / Καὶ λαὸς ὀρθόδοξος, ἀλλ' οὔπω πλατὺς (II, 1, 12, 79–82). See §2.1.2.1; §5.1.2.1.

the contrary, it is useful to stress the other bishops' role in the selection. However, the novelty of addressing the bishops as agents of the selection should not be understated.

Ephrem's rhetoric is totally different: in his poems, the bishops in their collegiality are not even mentioned, and the choice is wholly ascribed to God. The main rhetorical device used to make this point is the refrain, since almost every single refrain of *CN* 13–21 is a thanksgiving to God for having "chosen" (*gbā*) or "created" (*ʿbad*) the bishop[314]. Here one must recall the issues related to the performance of Ephrem's poems (see §1.2.1): the refrains stand out from the rest of the text for their repetitive character. Yet, while the refrains of *CN* 13–16 consist of a single line repeated identically after every verse, *CN* 17–21 vary the tenth and last lines of every verse, maintaining the same syntactic structure. Although less marked, the tenth lines of these poems still stand out: their structure is that of an acclamation, as is usual for Ephrem's refrains; they repeat more or less the same syntax throughout, with minimal changes; and they are always syntactically independent from the rest of the stanza[315]. It is likely that this peculiarity was mirrored in the performance of the poems, so that scholars usually hypothesise a collective delivery of the refrains.

This view—likely as it is—can be accepted only with some caveats: in the case of single-line refrains repeated identically after every stanza, there is the possibility that they stem from later editors of the manuscripts, in part or in full: the editor may have changed existing refrains or invented new ones where there was none[316]. This idea may be accepted as casting a reasonable doubt on the refrains, but in the absence of concrete clues as to which ones may be interpolated, it must remain only a doubt. Moreover, the addition of these refrains must have had a motive: either there were already refrains, and the editor simply changed them to suit his agenda, or there were no refrains, and the editor added them because the structure and performance of the *madrāšē* had changed in the meantime. I find the idea of changed refrains unlikely for *CN* 13–16, because they present the same focus on divine election as the refrains *CN* 17–21, which—given their variations

314 "Glory be unto thee, who chose them!" (*CN* 13, refrain); "Blessed is he who chose those three!" (*CN* 14, refrain); "Blessed is he who chose you, pride of our people!" (*CN* 15, refrain); "Blessed is he who made him our comfort!" (*CN* 17, 1, 10); "Blessed is he who made him the best!" (*CN* 17, 2, 10); "Blessed is he who made him their barn!" (*CN* 17, 3, 10); "Blessed is he who made you our pillar!" (*CN* 17, 5, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you for joy!" (*CN* 17, 6, 10); "Blessed is he who made his gift descend!" (*CN* 17, 10, 10; the gift is the Holy Spirit of the ordination); "Blessed is he who in his stead gave us thee!" (*CN* 18, 1, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you through concord!" (*CN* 18, 3, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you as our pride!" (*CN* 18, 6, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you as our farmer!" (*CN* 18, 8, 10); "Blessed is he who made you our lamp!" (*CN* 18, 10, 10 and *CN* 21, 1, 10); "Blessed is he who made you his treasurer!" (*CN* 19, 8, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you as our repose!" (*CN* 19, 9, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you as our fisherman!" (*CN* 19, 10, 10); "Blessed is he who handed to you his ministry!" (*CN* 21, 3, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you to be a priest!" (*CN* 21, 5, 10); "Blessed is he who chose you for our salvation!" (*CN* 21, 7, 10). The English "choose" always translates Syriac *gbā*, and English "make" translates Syriac *ʿbad*. The majority of other refrains bless God because of the virtues he infused in the bishop and some of them, especially in *CN* 20 and 21, praise God directly for some benefit.

315 See also Beck 1959, xxi.

316 Lattke 1989, 41.

and their strong thematic links with the respective verses—can hardly have been interpolated. As for the addition of refrains, there is no reason to believe that the performance of *madrāšē* changed in the time between Ephrem's death and our manuscripts; however, it may have been that some *madrāšē* had no refrain and the editor decided to conform them to the model with refrain. As regards the refrains of *CN* 17–21, one must note that they still present variations, so that, if the probability of later editorial interventions is reduced, the possibility of a collective delivery is equally limited to a prepared chorus; in other words, the congregation at large could not have performed those lines without preparation or a written copy. Even under these limitations, the link between these refrains and the theme of divine election remains significant: in proposing a collective delivery of these lines, the poet involves the voice of the community in the proclamation that the bishop has been chosen by God himself. Even if the chorus was formed by prepared ascetics (as seems to be the case, at least sometimes; see §1.2.1), they still would be representative of the community, since in early Syriac asceticism the ascetics also had a mediating function in respect of the community at large they represented its core.

The involvement of the community that is thereby suggested is not only a powerful expression of the consensus on the bishop's election but also a device reinforcing that same consensus, because in the sheltered space of liturgy, through the predetermined form of Ephrem's poetry, the voices of opposition cannot find a proper outlet, whereas the setting prompts even the reluctant to take part in the acclamation. As noted by Leppin, since the whole procedure of episcopal election aimed at consensus and lacked structured outlets for dissent, the matter could turn very risky very quickly: consensus was sorely needed[317]. To this somewhat cynical analysis, it is to be added that the two sets of poems (*CN* 13–16 and *CN* 17–21) were written in at least two different contexts. The assertiveness of *CN* 17–21 suggests more the celebration of an accomplished fact than a lobbying for a candidate. In this context, these poems should not be seen as insincere propaganda, but as a way to consolidate and express in a structured mode the consensus reached on the candidate, as well as (perhaps) a sense of relief and gratitude towards God, if the selection ran smoothly[318]. As regards *CN* 13–16, the poems engage a crisis in Valgash's authority (§4.2), so that the refrains cannot refer directly to the bishop's election. The refrains of *CN* 13–14 adopt a retrospective view, because they extend divine election on the three first bishops and not only on Valgash, thereby stressing more the continuing providence of God than the moment of election. The refrains of *CN* 15–16 focus on Valgash himself: here, Valgash's divine election may have been evoked to restore the original consensus surrounding his ordination in a time of crisis.

The idea of divine election is also present in the body of the poems, not only in the refrains, though the poet employs it less straightforwardly. For example, the poet argues

317 Leppin 2017, 43–44, 49–53.

318 Similar phenomena are attested for other Christian hymns: Williams 2013; Dunkle 2016, 38 (on Augustine's *Psalm against the Donatists*, see nn. 136–137) and 47–52 (on Ambrose). The idea is best described in relation to the Jewish *piyyutim* by Lieber 2010, 123–127. See also Kantorowicz 1958, 119–121.

that through ordination the bishop received a divine charisma, so that one could say the episcopate was given to him by God:

ܡܬܢܬܐ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܐܬܦܪܣ ܥܡܐ ܠܐ ܬܫܡ ܠܗ ܒܫܡ ܓܒܪܐ ܠܐ ܬܥܠܩ ܠܗ ܥܠ ܚܝܠ ܐܚܪܢܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕܠܐ ܡܫܟܚ ܐܢ ܡܛܠ ܕ[319]ܡܬܢܬܐ ܕܐܬܝܗܒ ܠܟ ܡܢ ܥܠ ܐܬܦܪܣ ܥܡܐ

(*CN* 17, 10)

In this stanza, Ephrem polemicises against a conception of the episcopate as merely a human office, an organisational articulation. On the contrary, the poet clearly defines it as divine charisma, calling it a "gift" (*mawhabtā*, which translates χάρισμα) and clarifying that it was bestowed by God and not by human beings. If, however, Ephrem is led to make such a remark, it must be because someone believed the contrary. Such a belief may have been based on the fact that the new bishop was consecrated by other bishops, so that the form of the liturgy may have given rise to the impression that "'twas men who gave it to you" (line 7). Anyway, it must be noted that here Ephrem defines the episcopate as a divine charisma, without saying that the individual bishop has been chosen by God. The function of these lines is less to defend Abraham as an individual worthy of the episcopate, and more to legitimise the office itself. The rhetoric of the "name" of the episcopate, similar to that of the "name" of the community at *CN* 20, suggests an antiheretical concern on the part of Ephrem: the pledge of the bishop's and community's orthodoxy is their acknowledgement of the divine origin and order of episcopal succession, while those who do not accept this succession or disqualify it as man-made are ipso facto outside of the community. The sacramental character of the episcopate guarantees the apostolic succession; therefore, it is a character of the "true church"[320].

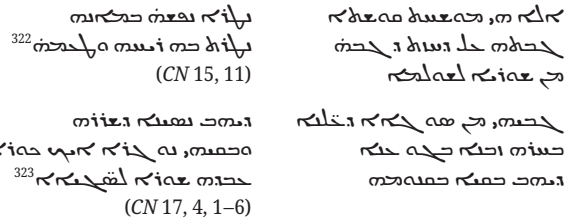
The idea of divine election is more clearly suggested by the image of the "horn of election seething" (*qarnā d-gabyūtā*, or simply *qarnā*, with the verb *rtaḥ*) in *CN* 17, 2, 7 and *CN* 19, 2, 4. The expression refers to the practice, attested in the Bible, of anointing kings, prophets, and priests. The seething suggests supernatural approval for the candidate, but curiously the detail of the horn as vessel for the oil is attested only for the anointments of Saul and David[321].

319 "The gift [*mawhabtā*] that was bestowed upon you / from on high descended floating: // do not name it in the name of a man, / nor hang it on to a different power, // since no one can reach its place. / The cunning Satan can convince, // that 'twas men who gave it to you, / but, since that gift is born free, // let only slavery serve men. / **Blessed is he who made his gift descend!**"

320 Griffith 1999.

321 Anointing of Aaron: Ex. 28:41; anointing of Saul and David: 1Sam. 10:1; 16:13; anointing of Elisha: 1Reg. 19:16.

Divine election is even more prominent in relation to the ascetic credentials of a bishop:



(*CN* 15, 11)[322]

(*CN* 17, 4, 1–6)[323]

These two passages are found in different contexts: *CN* 15, 11 concludes the presentation of Valgash's ascetic credentials to defend him to his community, whereas *CN* 17, 4 aims to explain why Abraham's recent election was good and legitimate. The imagery is also different, with *CN* 15, 11 reaffirming the theme of measure developed in stanzas 5 and 10 (see §3.2.1) and describing Valgash as a container for charisma, and *CN* 17 employing various biblical images (the vessel, the scent, and the crucible)[324] and a developed vocabulary of trial: in *CN* 17, 4, for example, Ephrem employs *nesyānā* (2), *bḥar* (3), *bqā* and *bqāyā* (4–5), all to express the ideas of "proof", "trial". These sundry expressions highlight that the two bishops were prepared by their asceticism for their office. These differences notwithstanding, both passages envisage the bishops as having been chosen by a supernatural entity, God in the case of *CN* 17, 4 and "Perfection" (*gmīrūtā*), also called "the measure of truth" (*mušḥat-quštā*), in *CN* 15, 11. The case of *CN* 17, 4 is pretty clear; *CN* 15, 11 may raise some doubt. That Ephrem is referencing Valgash's election and not simply his moral exemplarity is explained by the context, referencing his career at stanza 8 and continuing at the beginning of stanza 12 with the predicative *rēšā*, referring to Valgash. "Perfection" here refers to the third stage of growth in the faith, which the community had failed to reach (stanza 10) but which the bishop, thanks to his asceticism, preserved; for this reason, he was made bishop as third. Hence, "Perfection" choosing Valgash is part of the broader providential project to educate the

322 "Nevertheless, she [Perfection], the measure of truth, / preserved herself in his vessel, // chose him [*gbāt-eh*], seeing that he chose her [*gbā-h*], / preserved in him her scent and taste // from the beginning to the end."

323 "He chose him [*gbā-y*(*hy*)] in the multitude of musterers, / because he gave proof of his faith; // Time examined him in the herd, / and long wait proved him as a crucible. // Because of his personal trial, / he made him [*ʿabd-eh*] a wall to the multitude."

324 The idea of a "vessel" (*mānā*) prepared by God to contain charisma is Pauline and the Syriac Peshitta uses the same word for "vessel" as Ephrem at 2Cor. 4:7 and 2Tim. 2:20. The reference to "scent" (*rēḥā*, but mss. have **r-ḥ*) and "taste" (*ṭaʿmā*) is equally biblical. For "scent" referred to spiritual qualities, see §2.2.3.2 n. 261; for "taste": Mt. 5:13. The crucible (here *kūrā*) to refine precious metals as metaphor for a proof or trial is a staple of biblical language: Job 23:10; Ps. 66:10–12; Prov. 17:3; Jes. 48:10; Mal. 3:2–3; Zach. 13:9; 1Cor. 3:11–13; 1Petr. 1:6–7; 4:12.

community in Nisibis. Therefore, in both *CN* 15 and 17 Ephrem locates even evaluation of ascetic merit in God, who ultimately chooses the bishop.

The idea that bishops are ultimately chosen by God does not surprise. What is peculiar in Ephrem's position is that in his rarefied language he does not distinguish the process of selection, the liturgy of consecration, and the charisma associated with the office and stemming from God. The creation of a new bishop is represented as a simple act, through which God chooses and consecrates the candidate. Granted, the candidate has been selected from among the ascetics and the members of the clergy, but this selection is very different from the conscious co-optation of bishops addressed by Gregory; it is more the providential fulfilment of an ascetic career. In other words, at *CN* 17, 4 the ascetic life selects the candidate, and the election comes as a divine acknowledgement of that life. Compare that stanza from Ephrem with Gregory's analysis of the problem of bad bishops:

> Τὸ δ' αἴτιον· βολαῖς μὲν ἡλίου φασίν
> Κρίνειν νεοσσῶν ὄψιν ἀετὸν πανσόφως·
> Ἐξ ὧν νόθον μὲν καὶ τὸ μὴ γινώσκεται·
> Καὶ τὸν μὲν ἐξέρριψε, τοῦ δ' ἐστὶν πατήρ.
> Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥᾳδίως καθίζομεν, (375)
> Ἐὰν μόνον θέλωσι, λαοῦ προστάτας,
> Οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες τῶν νέων ἢ τῶν πάλαι,
> Οὐ πρᾶξιν, οὐ λόγον τιν', οὐ συνουσίαν,
> Οὐδ' ὅσον ἦχον γνωρίσαι νομίσματος,
> Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, (380)
> Ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων.
> (II, 1, 12, 371–381)

> Here's the reason: they say it is with the rays of the sun
> that the eagle tries his hatchlings' sight cleverly;
> through these, the bastard from the legitimate is told,
> and the one cast forth, the other recognised as son;
> we on the contrary enthrone easily anyone— (375)
> provided he wants it—as leader of the community,
> examining nothing of neophytes nor of older Christians,
> neither their behaviour, nor any of their words, nor their acquaintances,
> not even as much sound as suffices to evaluate a coin,
> and not those conspicuous for the trial by fire of time, (380)
> but those who there and then appear worthy of the throne.

Gregory's terminology is very similar to Ephrem's: he too uses a wealth of synonyms for "trial," "proof," and "selection" (κρίνειν, 372; γινώσκεται, 373; σκοποῦντες, 377; γνωρίσαι, 379; ἐνδεδειγμένους, 380); he too employs the metaphor of the crucible refining precious metals, referring to time, though in his case the metaphor is condensed in

the word πύρωσις, "trial by fire"[325]. It is interesting that for both Gregory and Ephrem the "fire" is "time" (χρόνου, 380; *zabnā*, *nugrā*, *CN* 17, 4, 3–4), perhaps a reaction to hasty ordinations of people lacking a proper ascetic or clerical career (in the case of Gregory, Nectarius would be the implicit target).

Gregory employs two extra analogies for the selection of candidates—namely, the legend of the eagle staring at the sun (371–374) and the sounding of coins (379). The sources and significance of these similes are explained by Meier[326], to whose account I add only two things. As regards the sounding of coins, besides the classical sources mentioned by Meier, there may be a reference to the famous ἄγραφον transmitted by Clement of Alexandria, «γίνεσθε δὲ δόκιμοι τραπεζῖται,» τὰ μὲν ἀποδοκιμάζοντες, τὸ δὲ καλὸν κατέχοντες (*strom*. 1, 28, 177). As regards Meier's view that the example of the eagle is demeaning for the bishops, because an animal is seen behaving better than prelates, the commentator has perhaps too literal a view of Gregory's simile. In the Bible, God and his faithful are often compared to the eagle, and even when the figure describes negative traits, they are rapacity, violence, and pride rather than mere bruteness. In patristic texts, the eagle is interpreted both ways—negative and positive—but it is not a demeaning symbol. In particular, the eagle is associated with kingship in ancient sources[327]. Hence, I would rather see this simile as drawing a parallel between the royal animal, the king of birds, capable of staring at the sun (a christological symbol) and of soaring higher than any other, and the office of bishop, which, according to Gregory, is οὐ κάκιστον (II, 1, 12, 180), a litotes that expresses its very high dignity and would be assigned to those who could contemplate God more deeply.

The formal similarities with Ephrem notwithstanding, Gregory adopts a different attitude here, attributing the agency of the choice to the bishops (ἡμεῖς). The same language of trial with which Ephrem justifies divine choice, presenting ascesis as a selection mechanism, is employed by Gregory to define the (in)action of the bishops, who should probe their candidates actively.

3.3.1.2 Other agents: People, predecessor

Although attributing the choice of bishops entirely to God, Ephrem does not obliterate the role of the people. This was already clear from the rhetorical structure by which he affirmed divine election—namely, the choral refrain—since that structure allowed the community, by recognizing divine election, to appropriate the choice. The poet likely does this to enhance and protect consensus in the community. Yet the refrains are not

325 For πύρωσις as "trial by fire", Meier 1989, 114, with some of the biblical passages listed in the previous notes.

326 Meier 1989, 113–114.

327 Ciccarese 1992, 297 (associated with kingship); 298 (rapacity, violence, pride); 320–333 (in patristic texts).

the only place for this operation, for he also represents consensus and approval of the election in his stanzas:

ܫܡܝܢ ܕܪܚܡ ܕܚܝ ܐܟܠ ܒܪܥܝܐ ܕܡܪܥܝܗ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܫܒܥ
ܘܚܕܘ ܕܡܪܥܝ ܫܘܒܚܐ ܕܫܘܬܦܗ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܫܒܥ
ܐܬܪܡ ܘܐܬܩܢ ܠܗ ܐܝܟ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܕܒܓܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܫܘܬܦܗ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܫܒܥ
ܠܡܬܩܢ ܒܚܝܐ ܠܗ ܡܢ ܪܘܫܐ ܕܒܓܘ ܟܝܢܐ ܕܫܘܬܦܗ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܫܒܥ
ܠܚܡܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܕܬܥܝܣܐ ܡܢ ܗܘ ܒܗ ܫܒܥ[328]
(*CN* 17, 3)

This stanza falls between a stanza (*CN* 17, 2) in which episcopal succession is presented impersonally with two passive verbs (*'eštammlī*, 8*; 'et'allī*, 9) and through the image of the horn of anointing seething and another stanza (*CN* 17, 4) which explicitly says that God chose the new bishop. Framed by this concept, *CN* 17, 3 represents the popular consensus surrounding the election. As he often does, Ephrem divides the community in subgroups, a rhetorical technique used also in the Bible to express totality[329]. In this case, three groups are distinguished, in an "increasing terms" structure, whereby the third group occupies four lines instead of two[330]: the "fat ones" (*šammīnē*, 1–2), the "musterers" (*'allānē*, 3–4), and the "body of the church" or the bishop's "limbs" (5-8 with 9 as an amplification of the last word of 8). The body of the church and her limbs are clearly the community at large and in general; the *'allānē* have been identified as members of the clergy already (§2.2.1.4).

Beck rightly notes that the "fat ones of the herd" (*šammīnē d-'ānā*) appear also at *hymn. fid.* 59, 12, 1–2, right after the *'allānē* (*hymn. fid.* 59, 11, 11). The editor concludes that these two groups must be linked but does not explain how[331]. Palmer suggests a different interpretation, identifying the "fat ones" as powerful laymen, satisfied by the preservation of their privileges guaranteed by Abraham's election[332]. Such an interpre-

328 "Even the fat ones of the herd rejoiced, / to keep feeding on the fodder they fed on; // the fold of the musterers rejoiced, / seeing the succession of their orders. // He lifted and fixed him as the mind / inside the large body of the church, // and his limbs surrounded him, / to be supplied by him with life, // the new bread of doctrine. / **Blessed is he who made him their barn!**".

329 For example: *CN* 19, 3–4; 10; *CN* 21, 5; see also: *CN* 2, 6; *Resurr.* 2, 9. Jer. 14:18; 31:13–14; Zach. 8:4–5; Judt. 16:4. The figure of speech in general is called merism and it is used in biblical poetry: Watson 1984, 321–324.

330 For the law of "increasing terms" (or Behagel's law): Best 2007, 82; it was known to ancient rhetoricians: ἐν δὲ τοῖς συνθέτοις περιόδοις τὸ τελευταῖον κῶλον μακρότερον χρὴ εἶναι (PsDemetr. Phal. *eloc.* 18); *quare aut paria esse debent posteriora superioribus et extrema primis aut, quod etiam est melius et iucundius, longiora* (Cic. *de orat.* 3, 48); it is prevalent in Indo-European languages (West 2007, 117–119) but not in Hebrew poetry (Watson 1984, 343). A quantitative study of this structure (as opposed to the more biblical parallelism) may shed light on how much of Greek rhetorical culture dripped in early Syriac literature.

331 Beck 1961a, 54n7.

332 Palmer 1998, 124.

tation would agree with the negative role of "the fat ones" in *hymn. fid.* 59, 12[333]: if *hymn. fid.* 59 was composed in the period of Valens, "the fat ones" may refer to secular authorities persecuting Nicene Christians in accordance with Valens's politics. The "fat ones" of *CN* 17, 3, 1–2 would then be another name for the *rēšānē* (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9) and the "stronger" and "rich" sheep of Abraham's flock[334]. Yet another possibility is to separate the *rēšānē* and the rich from the "healthy," and "fat" sheep (alluding to Hes. 34), taking *rēšānē* (*CN* 19, 3, 7–9) and "great", "rich" (*CN* 19, 10, 1 and 3) as literal terms, defining the condition of powerful laymen, while "fat ones" (*CN* 17, 3, 1–2) and "healthy" (*CN* 19, 4, 1) would be metaphorical terms that define the spiritual conditions of different members of the community. In this understanding, the "fat ones" would be the Christians who have progressed more, as opposed to the "weak" ones—namely, laymen. Such a division of the community, rooted in divisions of the Jewish people testified by the Bible and widespread in early Christianity, would, in the case of Syriac Christianity, naturally correspond with the distinction between the *bnay qyāmā* and the rest of the laity, so that our "fat ones" would be the ascetics[335]. This interpretation squares better with line 2, where the "fat ones" rejoice for the continuity of their fodder: instead of interpreting it *in malam partem* as does Palmer, we should take the "fodder" (*reʿyā*) as an allegory for the bishop's spiritual guidance, in particular his interpretation of Scripture. The ascetics, who were very interested in Scripture, could rejoice in the episcopal appointment, because the new bishop was as theologically proficient as his predecessor[336].

Whatever interpretation of this expression we may accept, the general meaning of the stanza remains the same: Ephrem is representing consensus around the election of the new bishop. Here again we face the underlying problem of these texts: How much of this stanza is truthful representation, and how much of it presents a desirable model to persuade the community to act it out? Lacking precise data, it is impossible to give

333 "Because those fat among the flock have grown fat and resistant, // The son of Buzi testified that they have gored the weak, // Cast down the sick, scattered those gathered, // And lost those who had been found" (*hymn. fid.* 59, 12, 1–7, transl. Wickes 2015, 299). The source is obviously Hes. 34, in part. verse 4.

334 see *CN* 19, 4, 1–4; 10 and §2.2.1.3.

335 The distinction between fat and lean cattle is at Hes. 34:20; Jesus speaks of "lost sheep of the House of Israel" (Mt. 15:24) and distinguishes between the healthy and the sick inside the Jewish people (Mc. 2:17; Mt. 9:12; Lc. 5:31). The Letters suggest more than once a distinction between beginners, "children" in the faith and perfected or mature Christians (Rom. 14:1–4; 15:1; 1Cor. 2:6; 3:1–3; Hebr. 5:13–14; 6:1). These passages were taken on by gnostic ecclesiologies and anthropologies to justify the divide between the normal Christians and the gnostic (for example: Iren. *haer*. 1, 6, 2); gnostic doctrines were then appropriated by Clement of Alexandria and Origen in a more catholic key (Monaci Castagno 2000, 440–443). A layered ecclesiology is not only presupposed by the strong Encratism of early Syriac sources (Vööbus 1958, 96–103), but also explicitly affirmed by fourth-century documents such as the *Book of Steps* (see: Murray 2006, 258–270).

336 Teaching, in particular of Scripture, is compared to bread at the end of the stanza (9); also: *CN* 17, 5, 1–2 (teaching as "spiritual meadow"); *CN* 14, 16; 21. As regards the parallel expression at *hymn. fid.* 59, 12, interpreting the "fat ones" as ascetics also in that case would not be impossible, considering the propensity of ascetic groups to stir doctrinal and disciplinary unrest in the communities.

an answer, but if we take into account the passages on envy and on the young age of Abraham, the poems *CN* 17–21 seem to suggest that consensus was not as widespread as Ephrem desired[337].

Another person important for the creation of a new bishop in Ephrem's poems is the bishop's predecessor. Indeed, Ephrem's representation of the episcopal election is that of a direct handover from the previous bishop to the new one. This representation is clearly outlined in the poems on Abraham:

ܡܫܠܡ ܠܬܠܡܝܕܗ ܝܕܗ ܕܝܠܗ ܠܡ ܚܕܐ ܕܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܡܪܝܐ
ܘܠܡܢ ܕܫܘܪܝܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܡܫܟܚ ܠܗ[338]
(*CN* 17, 6, 1–4)

ܡܫܡܫܢܐ ܕܝܢ ܗ ܚܠܦ ܗ ܕܝܠܗ ܕܥܡ ܫܡܫ ܫܢܝ ܗܘܐ ܠܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܝܠܗ
ܒܫܒܚ ܕܝܢܐ ܕܠܡܫܐ ܕܝܠܗ ܡܢ ܡܪܝ ܠܗ ܝܕܐ ܝܡܝܢ ܕܫܒܚ ܠܗ
(*CN* 19, 6, 1–5)

ܗܘ ܐܦ ܠܐ ܝܗܒ ܠܟ ܝܕܐ ܝܡܝܢ ܕܫܒܚ ܠܗ[339]

The model of Joshua and Moses is paradigmatic of this kind of succession, partly because the biblical texts join the imposition of hands with shepherd imagery, both very important for Ephrem's representation of the episcopate. Another element which makes it paradigmatic is the fact that Joshua was previously the servant of Moses, and his election is presented as a reward (*'agrā*) for this service[340]. Through this facet of Joshua's story, Ephrem not only reminds his audience of Abraham's credentials and career but also reinforces the connection between the old and new bishop, smoothing out the transfer of power. The same aspect is at work in the other biblical handover Ephrem refers to, that of Elijah and Elisha. Ephrem's mentions of Elijah and Elisha (*CN* 17, 2; *CN* 19, 8; *CN* 21, 2) share with those of Moses and Joshua the idea that serving the predecessor makes one worthy of succession and the idea of a similarity between predecessor and successor. However, the use of Elijah-Elisha seems to be more restricted in signifying the reception of charisma, especially preaching charisma, from God thanks to the imitation of the predecessor. The theme of consecration from the predecessor, the imposition of the hand, and the idea of leadership are absent from the Elijah-Elisha story.

Finally, Joshua's paradigm works in yet another way: in the biblical story, it is God, not Moses, who chooses Joshua; Moses is charged to arrange the transfer of power through the imposition of hands, but it is not up to him to name his successor. Alluding

337 See the analysis of *CN* 18, 3–4 at §2.1.2.2 and §3.1.1.1; of *CN* 19, 9 at §3.1.4.3.

338 "He delivered his hand to his own disciple, / the seat to the one who was worthy of it, // the key to the one who was faithful, / the pen to the one who was excellent."

339 "Joshua had served Moses, / and, as a reward for his service, // he received the right hand from him. / As you served the splendid old man, // he too gave you his right hand."

340 Joshua is the paradigm of faithful service also in the poems preserved in Armenian: Marès/Mercier 1961, 45. Curiously, the same idea is expressed in the Medieval Jewish *Midrash Rabbah Bamidbar* 12, 9 (https://www.sefaria.org/Bamidbar_Rabbah.12.9?lang=bi, accessed: 09.06.2024, 18:11).

to this narrative, Ephrem remains consistent in affirming his idea that the bishop is chosen by God, not by humans. This nuance is important, because Ephrem says that the old bishop "gave" (*y*(*h*)*ab*, *CN* 19, 6, 5) or "delivered" (*'ašlem*, *CN* 17, 6, 1) the office to his successor. Ephrem never mentions other bishops selecting or imposing their hands on the candidate, while the predecessor is framed in this role. If Ephrem's expression were to be taken literally, we would have the old bishop performing the ordination of the new one, so that the old bishop would be in a very strong position to choose his successor. Yet bequeathing the episcopate through will or ordering one's own successor is considered inappropriate, if not illegal, by our sources, even though their denunciation of it may respond to an actual practice, albeit not a widespread one[341]. Through the model of Moses and Joshua, Ephrem alludes to the fact that, even if the new bishop stands immediately after his predecessor and is therefore legitimated, it is not up to the predecessor to choose him, but only to God.

This analysis, however, leaves us with no clear path to the episcopate: Ephrem does say that God gets to choose, but how God's will is determined and what procedures (if any) ferried the community from one leader to his successor are questions that remain unaddressed. The poet does not distinguish selection from ascetic or clerical career, nor election from ordination. Even succession proper is not distinguished: the bishop receives the authority from his predecessor (succession) with the imposition of hands or with anointing (ordination) because God has chosen him (election) as a good ascetic or priest (selection). Finally, the whole community is called to rejoice in the new bishop (consensus). There is no diachronic development; these ideas are presented as independent or synchronous flashes.

It seems clear that the Abraham poems were written *after* the ordination of the bishop in question and that their aim is to praise and legitimise him. In doing so, they stress the theme of *yubbālā*, the apostolic "succession" guaranteed by God's providence and verified by the approval of and the similarity with the previous bishop. Furthermore, the poems enact various strategies to dramatise and thereby produce consensus: this focus on consensus also explains the legitimizing strategy behind the theme of *yubbālā*, as another weapon to build consensus. Ephrem's literary strategy is thus consistent with what we know about episcopal elections in the first centuries of Christianity: legitimation did not derive from procedure, but from consensus, because the "election" is not an arbitrary choice of the community sanctioned by the fairness of the proceedings, but a search for truth—in this case, for God's will. Hence, procedure exists only to build consensus and to forestall dissent[342]. The poet has the same aim, but he works ex post facto, so that it is useless for him to remind the audience of the procedures, once the result has been firmly established; it is useless to recall doubt once one has reached truth; rather, the strategy is to repeat truth and make everyone repeat it to

341 Rapp 2005, 196; Norton 2007, 204–214; Leppin 2017, 39.
342 Leppin 2016; Leppin 2017.

reinforce it. In this perspective we can also understand the direct handover from the predecessor to the successor: the aim of the scene is not to represent in any way, shape, or form the actual proceeding, but rather to express in a simple biblical image the idea of an uninterrupted succession of bishops guaranteeing that the new one has the stamp of approval and the same legitimacy as his predecessor had.

The lack of a discussion of the methods of selection and ordination demonstrates that Ephrem did not see a problem in the quality of candidates to the episcopate. On the other hand, the community, perhaps the clergy and the ascetics most of all, must not have been easily pleased or must have been prone to division and disputing episcopal elections, making the transfer of power a delicate matter. In this way we can explain Ephrem's particular focus on consensus and his omission of selection procedures: it is not that ideals on the episcopate and on the kind of candidate who is to be favoured are absent, but they are not presented as criteria for a future selection to those who must select; instead they are given as an accomplished fact in praise of the current bishop. Ideal features do not prompt selection; they confirm its correctness—and bind the recipient before the community for the future.

3.3.2 How to choose bishops? Gregory's rationalisation of charisma

The situation is completely different in the case of Gregory. As has already been said, Gregory is wholly aware of the role played by current bishops in the election of their future colleagues. At §3.1.3.1 and §3.1.4.1, I have analysed the historical framework in which Gregory situates his criticism of the episcopate: he was painfully conscious of the challenges posed to prelates and communities by the expansion of the church and her growing relations with the powers that be. The problem of selection is confronted in two of the four poems, II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13, and with two different rhetorical strategies—according to the respective genres of the poems.

3.3.2.1 Episcopate as a profession (II, 1, 12)

II, 1, 12, 371–792 is a discussion of the theme, proceeding through theses, objections, and responses to the objections. This treatment, closer to the structures of prose, is particularly apt for iambs, because this metre was considered the nearest to spoken language, and, through the tradition of iambic and dramatic poets, it lent itself to polemics and dialogue[343]. The pace of the discussion is digressive, in accordance with the canons of late antique poetic style. In his seminal book on late antique Latin poetry, Roberts calls it "jewelled style", because it enhances and stresses the particular over, and sometimes

343 Agosti 2001, 222–223, 231–233. This passage, though seasoned here and there with themes of invective (see §5.2.1 in particular for parallels in iambic literature), is mostly in the style of didactic iambs inspired by the diatribe.

at the expense of, the overarching structure and balance of the parts[344]. In Gregory's poetic argumentation, long-winded lists of similes and *exempla*[345], powerful one-liners and maxims[346], ecphrases[347], and an all-out digression[348] often distract from the line of reasoning, which, however, is for the most part traceable. This is partly thanks to the various framing lines, which isolate the digressions and push forward the argument[349].

As for its place in the context of the whole poem, the discussion of episcopal selection occupies the most lines: after the *exordium* and *narratio* (lines 1–69 and 70–153) and before the final *peroratio* (793–836), the argumentative core of the poem is mostly occupied with our theme (371–792). The terrain had been prepared by the tirades against the uneducated (154–191) and the immoral bishops (330–370) (see §5.2.1 and 3), and in part the discussion of Christian *paideia* anticipated the main problem of the selection of bishops: the relationship between charisma and credentials. In fact, Gregory's argument against the example of the apostles as uneducated precursors of the bishops is aimed at reconciling a charismatic vision of the office with some form of credentials recognition (192–329; see §3.1.3.3). The most relevant part in this respect is 371–569, after which Gregory reinforces the previous argument with a comparison of the ascetic and the worldly candidate (570–641, already in nuce at 549–554) and a tirade against the hypocritical (642–708) and the wire-pulling bishop (709–791).

I will broadly follow Gregory's argumentation in lines 371–569, highlighting interesting details here and there. Lines 371–396 (see §3.3.1.1) attribute the problem of immoral bishops to the lack of selectivity in the choosing of candidates—in particular, the lack of controls (οὐδὲν σκοποῦντες, 377) on their background from the reigning bishops. Gregory stresses the speed and almost automatic process through which any candidate can make his way to the episcopate[350]. In order to problematise this state of affair, he states three considerations: first, that power (ἐξουσία) tends to corrupt its recipient, so that it is better to closely examine the candidates for power (382–384)[351]; second, that the bishop has a most difficult and important task—namely, to lead the souls of the people in the storms of life, so that the person should be chosen with corresponding attention (38538–8); finally, through a classical *Priamel*, Gregory makes the point that it is absurd to find a good leader effortlessly and rapidly when less important things (like precious stones and race horses) are found with difficulty, especially if the candidate is barely baptised (πρόσφατος, 389–394; see also §2.1.2.1). This last remark, joined with

344 See Roberts 1989.

345 II, 1, 12, 389–394; 402–431; 555–567; Roberts 1989, 59—61.

346 II, 1, 12, 396; 430; 453; 484–485; 491; 511; 521; 568–569; see Roberts 1989, 37.

347 II, 1, 12, 575–633; see Roberts 1989, 39–41.

348 II, 1, 12, 647–746.

349 II, 1, 12, 371; 431–432; 442; 453–454; 501–503; 521–522; 541; 549; 570; 575; 610; 634–635; 658; 676; 696–700; 709–713; 747; 760–763; see Roberts 1989, 37.

350 Ῥᾳδίως καθίζομεν (375); ἐὰν μόνον (376); οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν (380); ἀλλ'αὐτόθεν (381); ῥᾳδίως εὑρίσκεται . . . πρόσφατος (393–394); ὢ τῆς ταχείας (395).

351 See Plat. *Gorg.* 526A-B for a similar idea.

the pervasive idea of speed, is an oblique allusion to Nectarius's hasty ordination during the Council of Constantinople after Gregory's resignation, since the imperial official had to be baptised and ordained right away. However, when Gregory laments the lack of information on the past life of candidates, he may well be preparing the ground for his criticism of hypocrisy and sudden "conversions" to a saintly life. After all, this was one of the problems Gregory had with Maximus: Gregory lacked information on Maximus and, therefore, relied on his feigned asceticism as a sign of true faith.

The introduction is closed by 395–396, in which Gregory curiously complains that the holy orders are left to chance: this exclamation sets the poet apart from Christian tradition, in which drawing lots was seen (at least sometimes) as a legitimate procedure for choosing church officials. Weber connects this selection procedure to the "routinisation of charisma", in the sense that the procedure originally adopted as a means of revelation of divine will can become, with time, the ground of legitimation for the recipient. The Christian sources that commend the drawing of lots tend to see it still as a revelation of divine will, so that it is not surprising to read Origen approving the practice, since his conception of the church was ideally charismatic[352]. In refusing and belittling the practice, Gregory tends to rationalise selection and, therefore, the office itself: this is, after all, in agreement with previous imagery, requiring from the bishop the expertise of the sailor and noting the scarcity of such expertise.

The first part of the argument is followed by a colourful tirade against those who live a life inconsistent with Christianity and then, suddenly, would seem to become pious and worthy of the episcopate (397–431; see §5.2.2). This section aims at persuading readers—through the artful contrast of worldliness and Christian life—that a thorough examination of the candidates' past is necessary, because it would be ludicrous to think that one might change so completely so quickly[353]. Lines 400–401 (Πολλή τις ὄντως ἡ χάρις τοῦ Πνεύματος, / Εἴγ' ἐν προφήταις καὶ Σαοὺλ ὁ φίλτατος), which would seem, through irony, to limit the grace of the Spirit, are not to be taken too seriously: we would be pushing them too far if we understood them as excluding the possibility that occasionally an unlikely candidate may make a good bishop through the grace of the Spirit. Rather, the meaning of these lines hinges on the commonsensical notion that such cases will be rare and cannot be assumed a priori as happening.

Among the inconsistencies between previous life and episcopal office, the pride of place is given to financial ones: from line 432 to 474, Gregory examines the case of the rich becoming bishop. First, he takes on the case of someone who became rich dishonestly (432–441), arguing that such a candidate should take some time between his baptism and his ordination to be proved (442–453). Moreover, he should not be content with settling his score, but should at least add some charity if he wants to purify himself

352 Πεσσῶν κυλίσματ'· ἐν κύβοις τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ (396). At Act. 1:23–26 the apostles choose to substitute Judas Iscariot with Matthias through the drawing of lots. Origen (*in Jos. hom.* 23, 2) approves of the practice. See: Weber 1922, 143; Leppin 2017, 41–42.

353 Meier 1989, 116–117 describes clearly the structure of the passage.

from his past (454–464). Again, this is related to baptism, in the sense that the sacrament cannot be intended as a blank cheque to do anything one wants (465–474). I have already examined the role of charity and greed in this passage (§3.1.1.3). I will add only that the choice of greed in particular at this point might have been suggested by the nature of Gregory's argument: since greed is, among the vices, the one that leaves the most concrete mark—in the form of wealth accumulated—it is also the perfect vice to demonstrate that baptism, far from being an easy way out, should be the beginning of a serious moral commitment—in this case, renouncing wealth.

The discussion of the greedy candidate introduces the problem of the relation obtaining between sacraments and credentials. The prominence of baptism in this discussion is another signal that Gregory is engaging the council's decision to elect Nectarius. To his protests on the moral unworthiness of the senator, the other bishops may retort that since he is still a catechumen, Nectarius will have baptism right before ordination, resolving the problem of his background. Gregory must demonstrate that baptism under these conditions does not invalidate his point. At first (442–453), the imagined counterpart claims to be purified by baptism, and Gregory retorts that even if his sins are forgiven, he has not lost his old habits, which will continually incline him to sin again. Although this argument may seem to imply that baptism has the sole effect of remitting sins, Gregory is not explicitly excluding that baptism may also have a positive effect on its recipient's faculty of avoiding sin; rather, he is implying that baptism does not override human freedom or the concreteness of acquired habits.

The second round of arguments on baptism (465–502) derives, in its first lines, from the debate on God's justice and mercy—namely, how these two apparently opposing attributes of the divinity may be reconciled, if they could[354]. In its substance, however, the discussion owes a debt to anti-Christian polemics on baptism: in particular, a putative fragment of Porphyry in Macarius Magnes's *Apocriticum* (4, 19) and two passages in Julian the emperor's oeuvre (*c. Galil.* 245C-D; *or.* 10, 336A-B). These pagan writers objected to baptism because it claimed to guarantee an easy forgiveness, thereby undermining not only the principle of justice and responsibility, on which the political community was founded, but also *paideia*, the hard work and discipline required by culture and philosophy to attain moral excellence[355]. Their approach has more than one similarity with Gregory's: our poet too sees the problem of baptism in the ease (ῥᾳδίως in Gregory, ῥᾷον in the pagan authors) and speed (αὐτίκα, αὐτόθεν, etc.) with which it is said to forgive sins;[356] he too plays out this ease against an idea of *paideia*

354 See Gregory's use of juridical terms: Πῶς γὰρ δίκαιον, τὴν βλάβην (465); Τὸ μὴ δίκας δοῦναί σε τῶν τολμημάτων (467); νῦν γὰρ οἶδ' ὀφειλέτην (473); and of derivatives of χάρις, especially χάρισμα: σοὶ δὲ τὸ χάρισμ' ἔχειν (466); Ἔχεις χάρισμα; (468); ἡνίκ' ἦσθα τοῦ χαρίσματος μέσος (470); Ζήτει χάρισμα (473).
355 All the negative ramifications of baptism in pagan polemics are analysed by Sandnes 2012.
356 On ease: Sandnes 2012, 517–520; μόνον βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐλευθεροῦται ῥᾷον (Porph. *adv. Chr. frg*. 88); cf. Ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντας ῥᾳδίως καθίζομεν (II, 1, 12, 375); ῥᾳδίως εὑρίσκεται (393). On speed: Sandnes 2012, 510–511; καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦν εὑρὼν ἀναστρεφόμενον

and asceticism[357]. Moreover, both Gregory and his pagan counterparts tend to conflate immoral and uneducated people enabled by baptism with the lower classes[358]. Finally, Gregory shares with pagan critics of baptism the metaphor of medicine for the ascetic or moral effort[359]. It is likely that Gregory knew Julian's attacks on baptism—if not even those of Porphyry—and decided to integrate them into his argumentation. Naturally, he could not do this without adapting them. First of all, Gregory is applying the argument specifically to bishops, not to baptism in general, so that the problem is shifted from the moral objections against baptism to the use of baptism to justify immoral bishops. Gregory does not object to the forgiving power of the sacrament, but he wants to define it better to avoid abuses. Second, Gregory's *paideia* has already been defined as a specifically Christian one (see §3.1.3.3), and we are far from the anti-intellectualistic stances accounted for by Sandnes[360]. Third, by adopting and adapting Julian's arguments, Gregory provides an indirect answer to them.

He does so by distinguishing actions from the habits caused by and causing those actions. This enables him to hold, at the same time, that baptism forgives sins (actions) and that it does not relieve one from training to virtue (habit)[361]. The classical account of

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καὶ προαγορεύοντα πᾶσιν· «Ὅστις φθορεύς, ὅστις μιαιφόνος, ὅστις ἐναγὴς καὶ βδελυρός, ἴτω θαρρῶν· ἀποφανῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν τουτῳὶ τῷ ὕδατι λούσας αὐτίκα καθαρόν, κἂν πάλιν ἔνοχος τοῖς αὐτοῖς γένηται, δώσω τὸ στῆθος πλήξαντι καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξαντι καθαρῷ γενέσθαι» (Iulian. Imp. *or.* 10, 336A); cf. Οὐδὲ χρόνου πύρωσιν ἐνδεδειγμένους, / Ἀλλ' αὐτόθεν φανέντας ἀξίους θρόνων (II, 1, 12, 380–381); τῷ χρόνῳ τι δὸς μόνον· / αἰτῶ σε μικρὰν τοῦ ποθοῦ προθεσμίαν. / εἰ δ'ἐκκαθαρθεὶς σήμερον… (444–446); Εἰ τῷ θέλειν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον. / Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον / Εἶναι καλόν τε κἀγαθὸν παραυτίκα. (565–567). Similar to the repetition of μόνον in these lines: ἅπαξ ἀπολουσάμενος ὀφθήσεται καθαρός … μόνον βαπτισθεὶς καὶ ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα … μόνον πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισάμενος (Porph. *adv. Chr. frg.* 88). Both themes (ease and speed) are at work later: Οὔς θᾶττον οἶμαι τοῦ μύσους τι λαμβάνειν / Ἢ τῆς ἑαυτῶν λαμπρότητος προσνέμειν. / Ῥᾷον κακοῦ γὰρ ἢ καλοῦ μετουσία (II, 1, 12, 509–511). Gregory even adapts as an absurdity a Christian counterexample to the injustice of unconditional forgiveness, namely the idea of the emperor bestowing grace on a condemned person (cf. II, 12, 479–480 with Macar. Magn. *apocrit.* 4, 25).

357 For the link between baptism and (the lack of) *paideia*: Sandnes 2012, 522–525; αἴτιον δέ, ὅτι τὴν ἑαυτῶν ψυχὴν οὐ παρέσχον ἀποκαθῆραι τοῖς ἐγκυκλίοις μαθήμασιν (Iulian. Imp. *ep. frg.* 295D; note that here *paideia* is the true purification); Πλάστης γὰρ ἄλλος ὁ τρόπος καθίσταται, / Ὃν ἔργον ἐκρίψαι τε καὶ πόρρω βαλεῖν (II, 1, 12, 491–492; morality as a job); Ἔστω δὲ λουτρὸν, εἰ δοκεῖ, καὶ τοῦτό σοι· / Τίς ἐγγυᾶται τὸν τρόπον χρόνου δίχα / Δεικνύντος, ὡς ἔσμηξε καὶ βάθος χάρις (522–524; the classic comparison of the statue follows at 538–540; see §2.2.3.1); Καὶ τοῦτ' ἀφήσω· τὴν χάριν δόξῃ κρατεῖν. / Πάντες τεθήπασ' οὐδ' ὁ μῶμος ἅπτεται. / Εὐθὺς μετ' Ἡλίαν σὺ τῷ σεμνῷ λόγῳ. / Πῶς ὢν ἄπειρος κάμαθὴς ἄνω κάθῃ . . . (541–544).

358 Sandnes 2012, 509; see §5.2.1.

359 Sandnes 2012, 524–525; Νῦν δ' οὐδὲν οἶδα φάρμακον πλὴν δακρύων, / Ἐξ ὧν συνούλωσις μὲν ἔρχεται μόγις (II, 1, 12, 497–498).

360 Sandnes 2012, 517–522.

361 The argument, already touched upon at II, 1, 12, 446–450, is then reprised and amplified at 491–500.

this kind of relation between habit, action, and virtue is given by Aristotle[362]. The Aristotelian idea of action shaping habit is taken up by Origen in order to allegorise various animal images in the Bible: for Origen, man through sin degrades the image of God in himself to the point that it becomes the image of an animal; whether Origen meant that the soul could be reincarnated in the body of a brute has been disputed since antiquity, but certainly Gregory's 486–490 are inspired by Origen's idea[363]. Another Origenian theme in this passage (493–496) is the idea of a baptism of fire after death[364].

In this context, Gregory's insistence on restitution of stolen goods *before* baptism aims at setting prerequisites to access forgiveness, to avoid the objection that any immoral person may find forgiveness easily and without actual repentance. In Weberian terms, the attempt at striking a balance between justice (accountability) and grace (charisma), between forgiveness and moral effort, puts limitations on the charismatic nature of the office, guaranteed by the charismatic cleansing of baptism, in favour of more rational criteria.

It is worthwhile to examine 477–478 more closely: "Do not become now a laughingstock, / purifying others while you yourself are soiled"[365]. This is the closest Gregory gets to Donatism, because here he objects to the administration of sacraments by unworthy bishops. However, he does not object to the validity of a baptism administered by a bad bishop; he just questions its propriety, pointing out the public scandal of an immoral bishop claiming to administer forgiveness of sins to others while he himself still needs forgiveness. This is precisely the kind of scandals pagans like Julian love to mock in Christianity. The fact that Gregory, albeit adopting pagan objections, takes for granted the validity of the baptism performed by a bad bishop, shows how much of the charismatic aspect of sacraments and hierarchy he maintains, for all his rationalisation of the criteria of succession.

The next argument Gregory dispels (503–521) is that episcopal ordination could perhaps purify the recipient of his sins. Gregory shows scepticism towards this idea, both because there cannot be a second baptism, as he has already said (493), and because Scripture seems to suggest the contrary—namely, that rather than purify their recipient, the holy orders may contaminate those who administer them, if they choose

362 Aristot. *eth. Nic.* 1103a-b, where however the term for habit is ἔθος, not τρόπος as in Gregory. Τρόπος is used by Aristotle in a passage of the *History of Animals* (Ἔνεστι γὰρ ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων ἴχνη τῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τρόπων, ἅπερ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἔχει φανερωτέρας τὰς διαφοράς· καὶ γὰρ ἡμερότης καὶ ἀγριότης, καὶ πραότης καὶ χαλεπότης, 588a), but in general it seems a less technical, more casual term for "character" or "habit", as demonstrated by its generalised use by Plato, tragic and comic poets (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1827, *s.v.* τρόπος III.2).

363 Crouzel/Simonetti 1978, 119–125; Crouzel 1956, 197–206; Καὶ τῆς ἄνωθεν εἰκόνος τὴν ἀξίαν / Καθυβρίσαντας ἑρπετῶν ἢ θηρίων / Μορφαῖς, ἀφ' ὧν ποιούμεθα ζηλουμένων; / Πλάστης γὰρ ἄλλος ὁ τρόπος καθίσταται, / Ὃν ἔργον ἐκρίψαι τε καὶ πόρρω βαλεῖν. / Οὐδὲν γάρ ἐστι δεύτερον καθάρσιον (II, 1, 12, 488–492).

364 Orig. *in Mt. comm.* 15, 23; Sfameni Gasparro 1984, 214–216.

365 ἀλλὰ νυνὶ μὴ γελῷ / Ἄλλους καθαίρων αὐτὸς ἐσπιλωμένος (II, 1, 12, 477–478).

an unworthy candidate. To substantiate this, Gregory mentions the classic 1Tim. 5:22, where the bishop who ordains too swiftly an unworthy candidate participates in his guilt, and also Hag. 2:12–13, on the fact that sacred things do not communicate their sacredness, but instead take on the impurity of profane things. In the same manner, the bishops consecrating a sinner partake in the guilt of his sins instead of communicating their charisma[366].

Then, for the sake of argument (εἰ δοκεῖ, 522), Gregory concedes that either baptism or ordination may purify someone—though, he notes, it would be better to wait some time, in order to verify the depth of the recipient's conversion (522–526). Whereas he previously discussed the inner disposition that allows the sacrament to unfold its fullest powers, without thereby denying the objective power of the sacrament, now he progressively concedes space after space to charisma irrespective of credentials and dispositions: he concedes a complete purification without conditions (527–530), objecting that the bishop's renown would still be tarnished by his past (531–540); he concedes a charisma overriding even human fame (541–543), objecting that all these easily acquired gifts would prevent the bishop from learning, even though he is inexperienced and unlearned (ἄπειρος κἀμαθὴς, 544–548); Gregory concedes that the new bishop may well want to learn, but the bishop's task is to teach, so that doing both at the same time would be scarcely feasible (549–554). With this progressive movement, Gregory has reached the point that matters the most: competence. His main problem seems not to be that sinners are ordained bishops, undesirable as this circumstance may be, but that inexperienced people are ordained.

This is demonstrated in the content and forms of Gregory's argument. As regards contents, Gregory never really doubts that baptism may purify even the worst sinner or that penitence may obtain forgiveness. His problem is with considering baptism a mere formality under the pretence of its charismatic power: his problem is not with the sinner per se but with the sinner remaining a sinner. His solution is always the same: time and discipline, which concretely means training, *paideia*. Further proof of this is that he concedes that the sacrament may charismatically grant moral purification and public recognition, but he never concedes that it could grant theological proficiency, ascetic practice, and moral excellence. These, though not wholly independent from the

366 Ῥᾷον κακοῦ γὰρ ἢ καλοῦ μετουσία. / Γνώσῃ δ' ἐκεῖθεν, ὡς ἀληθεύει λόγος· / Κρέας γὰρ εἰ ψαύσειεν ἡγιασμένον / Ποτοῦ, Μιχαίας φησίν, ἢ βρωτοῦ τινος, / Οὐκ ἄν ποθ' ἁγνίσειεν οὗ ψαῦσαν τύχοι· / Ἐκ τῶν δ' ἀνάγνων ἁγνὰ κοινωθήσεται. / Ταῦτ' οὖν ὁ θεῖος Παῦλος εὖ πεπεισμένος / Ἐν οἷς τυποῖ Τιμόθεον ἐξ Ἐπιστολῆς / Νόμον τίθησι, μὴ προχείρως τὰς χέρας / Ἄγειν ἐπ' ἄλλον, μηδὲ κοινοῦσθαι τρόπον· / Ἀρκεῖν γὰρ ἡμῖν φόρτον οἰκείων κακῶν. (II, 1, 12, 511–521); cf. Ἐὰν λάβῃ ἄνθρωπος κρέας ἅγιον ἐν τῷ ἄκρῳ τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἅψηται τὸ ἄκρον τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἄρτου ἢ ἐψέματος ἢ οἴνου ἢ ἐλαίου ἢ παντὸς βρώματος, εἰ ἁγιασθήσεται; καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ εἶπαν Οὔ. καὶ εἶπεν Αγγαιος Ἐὰν ἅψηται μεμιαμμένος ἐπὶ ψυχῇ ἀπὸ παντὸς τούτων, εἰ μιανθήσεται; καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ εἶπαν Μιανθήσεται. (Hag. 2:12–13); χεῖρας ταχέως μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει μηδὲ κοινώνει ἁμαρτίαις ἀλλοτρίαις· σεαυτὸν ἁγνὸν τήρει. (1Tim. 5:22). On the false attribution to Micah of the passage from Haggai see Meier 1989, 129.

grace of the Spirit, are always contingent upon the free will of the recipient. By stressing the value of free will even in the face of charisma, Gregory is following in the steps of Origen, who believed that divine inspiration could never override the reason and free will of the inspired human and that any such phenomenon should be related to demonic inspiration[367].

From the point of view of form, it is of note that the argument is all built to move from the discussion of sacramental theology to the theme of teaching and expertise: the very fact that Gregory kept this argument as his last demonstrates that he deemed it his strongest and most important. Moreover, he expands on the argument in two ways, first through the *Priamel* of highly specialised jobs in 555–569 (examined at §2.1.2.1; §2.2.4.9), then with the diptych of the ascetic and the worldly Christian in 570–634 (§3.2.2). It is also interesting to note that, in the course of the argument and thanks to the digressive pace we have already noted, Gregory's focus has undetectably shifted from the bishops selecting a candidate to the candidate himself. One can demonstrate this by comparing the *Priamel* in 389–395 with that in 555–569—the one treating the leader as a rare object to find, the other treating the leader's work as a profession or art difficult to learn—and by confronting the expressions of 371–399, where the subject (first-person plural) is clearly the body of bishops deciding whom to consecrate, whereas after the digression of 402–431 the subject becomes a second-person singular, the candidate himself. In my opinion, this is admissible because Gregory is consciously addressing both bishops and potential candidates or bishops who were elected hastily (Nectarius); formally, it makes no problem because of the digressive aesthetic Gregory shared with his audience.

The *Priamel* of 555–569 is particularly significant, because it compares the episcopate to a series of highly specialised professions:

Πύκτης μὲν οὐδεὶς, ὅστις οὐ τὸ πρὶν χέρα (555)
Προΰβαλλεν οὐδ' ἐσκέψατ' εὔκαιρον στάσιν,
Οὐδὲ σταδιεὺς μὴ τὼ πόδε προγυμνάσας.
Αὐλοὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' εὖ φρονῶν αὐθημερόν
Τέτμηκεν, ἐξήσκησεν, ἠγωνίσατο;
Γραφεὺς δὲ τίς ποτ' ἄκρος ἠκούσθη ποτέ (560)
Μὴ πολλὰ μίξας χρωμάτων μορφώματα;
Ἐρρητόρευσεν δ' ἢ νόσους τίς ἤλασεν
Πρὸ πλειόνων λόγων τε καὶ νοσημάτων;
Μικροῦ γ' ἂν ἦσαν αἱ τέχναι τιμήματος,
Εἰ τῷ θέλειν ὑπῆρχε τὸ κτᾶσθαι μόνον. (565)
Τὸν δὲ πρόεδρον δεῖ κελευσθῆναι μόνον
Εἶναι καλόν τε κἀγαθὸν παραυτίκα.
Καὶ τοῦτ' ἐκεῖνο· Πρᾶξίς ἐστιν ἡ φάσις.
Χριστὸς κελεύει, καὶ κτίσις παρίσταται.
(II, 1, 12, 555–569).

367 Orig. *c. Cels.* 7, 3–4; *in Hes. hom.* 6, 1.

There is no boxer who hasn't begun by holding forth
his hand or by looking for the favourable position;
nor a runner not training his feet in advance;
which sane human, in just one day,
has ever cut, wrought, and played a flute in a contest?
Of which consummate painter has it ever been hear
that he did not mix many different qualities of colours?
Who harangued or healed a disease
before many pleas and many diseases?
Small indeed would be the renown of art
if the bare will sufficed to its acquisition.
Yet the prelate is required, and he alone,
to be admirable and excellent straightway.
But, as the saying goes, "No sooner said than done":
Christ orders, and a creature forms.

Athletes, musicians, artists, attorneys, and physicians—the examples here mentioned by Gregory—were not likened to the landed gentry, occupied with leisure and public activities, nor to the *humiliores*, who worked the land. Granted, they worked—differently from the landowners, but their work placed them in the public sphere and, most of all, required a particular knowledge (τέχνη, 564), partially different from the *paideia* of the nobles. Furthermore, this particular knowledge required in some cases (such as that of physicians and attorneys) special institutions—namely, specialised schools or gymnasia—for its transmission, and with school tend to come different styles and disputes internal to the discipline[368]. In this respect, the parallel between physician and orator (562–563) may be baffling, since the orator should be by definition the example of generic *paideia*, the noble engaged in public life through his word. However, the terms (ἐρρητόρευσεν, 562; λόγων, 565) may be interpreted in a more specific sense, as referring to the advocate: these figures, who, like the physicians, were often upper-class, were not exclusively trained in *paideia*, but also had to know Roman law[369]. Law

368 On Gregory's assimilation of the bishop to ancient professionals, with particular attention to medicine: Elm 2000a. On the legal standing of professions in antiquity: Csillág 1971. For a somewhat dated but still useful overview of the condition of professionals (physicians, architects, visual artists and performers): Jones 1964, 1012–1021 (contrast with the life and condition of wealthy landowners: 557–561). For the athletes as professionals in late antiquity: Remijsen 2016; for musicians: Webb 2013; for physicians: Barton 1994; Cracco Ruggini 2003.

369 For ῥήτωρ as "advocate", "barrister": Lampe 1961, 1217, *s.v.* ῥήτωρ 2. Among the many meanings of λόγος, there is not only that of "speech", "harangue" in court (Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 1057–1059 *s.v.* λόγος V.4) but also of "plea", "case" (III.1.b). Advocates may have had only a cursory knowledge of Latin, but they either studied law in an institutional school or were trained through experience (Cribiore 2007, 205–213; Jones 1964, 988–991). Cribiore 2007, 212n77, on the basis of texts from Libanius, says that in 388 the *praefectus praetorio orientis* Flavius Eutolmius Tatianus promulgated a law binding advocates to the study of Roman Law.

studies, and the Latin language, which was necessary to practice them, often had a difficult relationship with the equally necessary *paideia*, as witnessed by Libanius[370].

What does this likening of episcopate and professions tell us about Gregory's conception of the episcopate? First, it stresses the importance of preparing for the episcopate, of ἄσκησις—as the ascetic portrayal that follows immediately (570–634) will clarify. In this respect, Gregory is trying to rationalise the selection of prelates, using the institutions closest to the model of rational meritocracy that his world could offer[371]. This does not eliminate the charismatic element of religious leadership, but in Gregory's perspective this element is ingeniously reserved to the sacrament, which acts beyond the individual merits of the recipient, as he admits[372]. Thus, charisma is reified and becomes disposable, in that the reigning bishops may allot it as they see fit. In this context the setting of parameters and requisites for the selection of candidates becomes justified. The rationalisation of the bishop's office proposed by Gregory aims at maximizing the competence of prelates, excluding heretics, uneducated persons, and political grifters.

Second, from a cultural perspective, the link to professionals ties into Gregory's effort to define a specifically Christian *paideia*. If indeed for Plato the world of τέχναι is most of all the model of an institutionalised, teachable, and authoritative knowledge that *works*, and if after him it becomes commonplace to compare it to philosophy, Gregory uses τέχναι as a model because they were not quite *paideia* and yet they shared many features thereof[373]. Christianity, as well as the professions, required *paideia* as an introductory study, but at the same time Christianity and the professions added something to *paideia*, something that was seen as peculiar to their trade, as was Roman law for the attorneys. Furthermore, the practitioners of such τέχναι would have had a less sedentary life than educated landowners, and this agrees with Gregory's ideal ascetic and bishop, a stranger (ξένος) everywhere he goes[374]. As *paideia*, the τέχναι tended to be monopolised by the upper class, and yet they were not so organic to that class as *paideia*.

This brings us to the third reason Gregory chooses the τέχναι as a model: from the point of view of society, the professional was something of an outsider to the network of relations of *paideia*. Granted, he participated in the network and came from the upper class, but he did not participate on the same ground as *curiales* or imperial officials: his

370 Cribiore 2007, 205–213. Some students may have even abandoned rhetorical education after a short time to pursue on-the-field experience as attorneys.

371 Weber 1922, 126–127.

372 See, for example: μηδὲν φοβηθεὶς τοῦ θρόνου τὴν ἀξίαν. / πάντων τὸ ὕψος, οὐχὶ πάντων δ'ἡ χάρις (II, 1, 12, 36–37) and §2.2.4.6.

373 On the professions mentioned by Gregory as commonplaces to characterise the philosopher, see: Meier 1989, 133–134. On Plato and the τέχναι most of all: Cambiano 1991; the significance of the τέχναι for Plato (but not for Plato's reception) is somewhat reduced by Brisson 2000 and Roochnik 1996.

374 For the value of ξενιτεία in Gregory's asceticism, in particular its links with the Syrian institution of moving bishops, see Gautier 2002, 9–16 and in particular 69–77.

role of expert shaped his social position in a way similar to what *parrhesia* did for the philosopher. Indeed, philosophy and τέχνη were linked in rhetoric as well as in reality: some philosophers could see themselves as professionals, specifically as "physicians of the soul". In this, they differed fundamentally from the approach of more academic philosophers, because the "physicians of the soul"—as well as other professionals—sought not to reach truth by means of reason and debate, but claimed to already possess truth and to apply it. Moreover, the model of the professional—the physician in particular—accounts for the asymmetrical relationship between the bishop and his parishioners. This asymmetry, which is typical of the relationship between craftsmen and pupils or clients, allows Gregory and other Christian authors to reapply the religious imagery of initiation into a profession to the literally religious initiation of the bishop[375]. The ambiguous social position of the professional is perfect for Gregory's aims, because it allows him to criticise both Nectarius, who has the status but lacks specific expertise, and Maximus, who feigns expertise but lacks status (which invalidates his expertise). Among the three rivals, the only one with a consistent curriculum is Gregory, son of a landowner but devoted since his youth to the specific study of Christianity and to the ἄσκησις of a future champion.

3.3.2.2 A call to action (II, 1, 13)

Though it furthers the same agenda, II, 1, 13 has a different rhetorical approach, one that brings to fruition the whole tradition of hexametric poetry. From the point of view of structure, Gregory's argument occupies the greater part of the core of the poem, and it is organised as a diptych. It begins inside the herald's discourse, after the invective (75–88), with a sneering declaration of general indifference (89–99), which devolves into another invective (100–115). Here end the words of the herald, and Gregory produces a series of biblical testimonies cautioning against rash elections (116–138).

After an interlude (139–163), in which the actual behaviour of bishops belies Gregory's expectations, the poet declares a change of theme, from the leaders to the people (164–165). It follows another bitter declaration of general indifference (166–183) and a series of biblical examples of ritual purity (184–195). This second part is framed with a γνώμη—Τοῖα μὲν ἡγητῆρες· ὁ δ' ἕσπεται ἐγγύθι λαὸς, / Πρόφρονες ἐς κακίην, καὶ ἡγητῆρος ἄνευθεν (II, 1, 13, 164–165)—which signals the change of theme. Furthermore, lines 166–183 seem to refer to a disparity in the bishops' treatment of the popula-

375 Lyman 2000, 154–155 for Epiphanius and the difference between apology and heresiology; this is precisely the difference between Gregory's conception of Christian culture and Origen's: for all their similarities, Gregory conceives truth as a given and culture as a way to propagate, apply, preserve and restore truth, whereas for Origen the task of the Christian intellectual is to look for truth (hence his aporetic method, completely absent from Gregory; see Perrone 2000) and to engage in academic disputes with different understandings of truth. For the philosopher as "physician of souls" and the asymmetry in the relationship with the pupil, see Nussbaum 1994, 494–497. On the religious, initiatory nature of the relationship with a professional: Barton 1994, 82–85, 90–94.

tion (τοῖα δικασταῖς / εὔαδεν ἡμετέροισι, 173–174) in terms of rewards for morality and moral guidance; but then lines 184–195, with their comparison of roles in the Church with the different services of the Jewish temple, clarify that the failure to draw distinctions based on morality relates to ecclesiastical careers and ordinations. Thus, the difference between the treatment of the theme from the point of view of leaders and from the point of view of the people is slender at best. The parallel sections 89–99 and 166–183 on one side and 116–138 and 184–195 on the other are effectively duplicates, both perfectly apt for the situation of the bishops. Interestingly, while 89–99 together with 166–183 mix and contaminate pagan and biblical examples, the passages in 116–138 and 184–195 are exclusively biblical. Through these references, both biblical and pagan, Gregory reinforces the historical perspective already formulated in the initial *narratio* (see §3.1.4.1). As we shall presently see, however, he institutes two competing models of historical explanation—namely, decadence and desecration. In the next pages, I will treat chiefly these passages, reserving the invectives (75–88; 100–115; 139–163) for another chapter (§5.2).

The first passage on the selection of bishops, 89–99, is inserted in the fictive discourse of the herald[376]. This literary device is significant for many reasons. First, it is a creative use of the rhetorical exercise of the *ethopoeia*, by which the student would speak "in the character" of another person, usually a famous figure of myth or history[377]. In this case, the herald verbalises the actions of the bishops: Gregory's exercise is to imagine what a herald might say if he had to advertise and explain the behaviour of the bishops. From the point of view of logic, the procedure amounts to setting up a straw man. However, it would be an error to consider this poem only from a logical point of view, because—differently from II, 1, 12—the poet is here more concerned with literary and emotional values than with arguing against an opposing position. The straw-herald is effective precisely because the bishops would *not* verbalise, advertise, or explain their behaviour; no one would openly admit that such behaviour was justifiable, and having a herald proclaim it brazenly should prompt recognition of its absurdity. Furthermore, there is a good deal of satire in the herald's discourse, the irony being that the character proclaims loudly and proudly exaggerated things—for example, that hideous criminals can be bishops or that everyone can become a bishop. It is conceivable that such a satire had different effects on different hearers: Gregory may have aimed at pressuring his peers to more caution in bishop elections, while powerful laypeople were encouraged to discern between bishop and bishop—to the benefit of committed bishop-ascetics like Gregory.

376 Cf. 73–74: ὡς δοκέω μοι / κήρυκος βοόωντος ἐνὶ μεσατοῖσι ἀκούειν; and at 116: κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπυος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε . . .

377 On *ethopoeia*: Amato/Schamp 2005. On the importance of προγυμνάσματα (rhetorical exercises) for late antique poetry and for Gregory in particular see §1.3.1; §5.1.3.

Second, the herald's discourse has a structural function as a framing device[378]. Whereas II, 1, 12 employed the logical passages of its argument as framing lines for digressive descriptions and catalogues, the herald's discourse allows for a framing without logical arguments, which, in a hexametric context and after the dignified *narratio* of 27–71, would have been clumsy. Instead, the herald is introduced and dismissed with epic formulae so that, while the iambic framing was dialectical, we can say that the epic one is narrative[379].

Third, the device of the public proclamation, especially as an instrument of irony in a polemic, had been employed by pagan critics of Christianity, and Gregory took it directly from them: in fact, Celsus used it and Origen quotes the passage in a chapter of *Contra Celsum* found in the *Philocalia*, a collection of Origenian excerpts probably put together by Gregory and Basil; another instance of the device is found in the passage of Julian's *Symposium* on baptism already recalled (note 356). Celsus and Julian employed this rhetorical device in the frame of their polemics against baptism and the undiscriminated call of Christians to all sorts of people. We have already seen that Gregory employed those pagan talking points in II, 1, 12, employing them for bishop selections rather than simple baptism. In II, 1, 13 the technique is the same: the rhetorical manoeuvre, through which pagans attacked the very concept of Christian baptism, is repurposed to attack a (perceived) bad habit regarding bishop elections[380].

As regards the contents of lines 89–99, the basic idea is that ordinations are distributed carelessly:

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378 Roberts 1989, 37.

379 Cf. some of the framing lines of II, 1, 12: τὸ δ'αἴτιον˙ (371); σὺ δ'εἰπέ μοι (432) ἔστω δὲ μὴ κακός τις (454) εἴποι τάχ'ἄν τις (503); ἔστω δὲ λουτρόν εἰ δοκεῖ καὶ τοῦτο σοι (522); with those of the herald at II, 1, 13: ὡς δοκέω μοι / κήρυκος βοόωντος ἐνὶ μεσατοῖσι ἀκούειν (73–74); κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπυος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε . . . (116). As regards the post-discourse expression, while the adjective βριήπυος is a Homeric hapax (*Il.* 12, 521), the use of τοῖα is an innovation of Apollonius (Fantuzzi 1984, 90–92) often repeated thereafter (Callim. *hymn. in Del.* 109; *hymn. in Cer.*, 97; Oppian. *halieut.* 5, 565; Oppian. *cyneg.* 2, 362; 373), and the final Adonic αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε is formulaic from Homer onwards (*Il.* 1, 282; 15, 401; 24, 244; Apollon. Rhod. 2, 634; *Argonautica Orphica* 572; 945; *Lithica Orphica* 316).

380 τοιαῦτα ὑπ' αὐτῶν προστάσσεσθαι· μηδεὶς προσίτω πεπαιδευμένος, μηδεὶς σοφός, μηδεὶς φρόνιμος· κακὰ γὰρ ταῦτα νομίζεται παρ' ἡμῖν· ἀλλ' εἴ τις ἀμαθής, εἴ τις ἀνόητος, εἴ τις ἀπαίδευτος, εἴ τις νήπιος, θαρρῶν ἡκέτω (Orig. *c. Cels.* 3, 44); Οἱ μὲν γὰρ εἰς τὰς ἄλλας τελετὰς καλοῦντες προκηρύττουσι τάδε· ὅστις χεῖρας καθαρὸς καὶ φωνὴν συνετός, καὶ αὖθις ἕτεροι· ὅστις ἀγνὸς ἀπὸ παντὸς μύσους, καὶ ὅτῳ ἡ ψυχὴ οὐδὲν σύνοιδε κακόν, καὶ ὅτῳ εὖ καὶ δικαίως βεβίωται. Καὶ ταῦτα προκηρύττουσιν οἱ καθάρσια ἁμαρτημάτων ὑπισχνούμενοι. Ἐπακούσωμεν δὲ τίνας ποτὲ οὗτοι καλοῦσιν· ὅστις, φασίν, ἁμαρτωλός, ὅστις ἀσύνετος, ὅστις νήπιος, καὶ ὡς ἁπλῶς εἰπεῖν ὅστις κακοδαίμων, τοῦτον ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ δέξεται (3, 59); τὸν Ἰησοῦν εὑρὼν ἀναστρεφόμενον καὶ προαγορεύοντα πᾶσιν, "Ὅστις φθορεύς, ὅστις μιαιφόνος, ὅστις ἐναγὴς καὶ βδελυρός, ἴτω θαρρῶν: ἀποφανῶ γὰρ αὐτὸν τουτῳὶ τῷ ὕδατι λούσας αὐτίκα καθαρόν, κἂν πάλιν ἔνοχος τοῖς αὐτοῖς γένηται, δώσω τὸ στῆθος πλήξαντι καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν πατάξαντι καθαρῷ γενέσθαι,' (Iulian. Imp. *or.* 10 336A-B). Cf. with: Δεῦρ' ἴθ' ὅσοι κακίης ἐπιβήτορες, αἴσχεα φωτῶν / … Δεῦρ' ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρὺς ἕτοιμος (II, 1, 13, 75; 89).

Δεῦρ’ ἴτε θαρσαλέοι. πᾶσι θρόνος εὐρὺς ἕτοιμος,
Δεῦρ’ ἴτε, δεξιτερῇσι νέους κλίνοιτε τένοντας (90)
Πᾶσι προφρονέως, καὶ μὴ ποθέουσι τέτανται.
Μάννα πάλιν, ξένος ὄμβρος· ἅπας κόλποισι λέγοιτε,
Ὅς πλέον, ὅς τ’ ἐπιδευὲς, ἴην χάριν. Εἰ δ’ ἐθέλοιτε,
Μηδ’ ἁγίου φείδοισθε θεουδέος ἤματος ἀργοῦ.
Ἦ τάχα καὶ παλάμῃσιν ἐν ἁπλήστοισι πύθοιτο. (95)
Ξυνὸς μὲν πάντεσσιν ἀὴρ, ξυνὴ δέ τε γαῖα,
Ξυνὸς δ’ οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς, ἅ τ’ οὐρανὸς ὄμμασι φαίνει,
Ξυνὴ δ’ αὖ πόντοιο χάρις, ξυνοί τε θόωκοι.
Θαῦμα μέγ’, οὐδὲ Σαοὺλ χάριτος ξένος, ἀλλ’ ὑποφήτης.
(II, 1, 13, 89–99)

Come on, here, bold ones, a broad throne is ready for everyone!
Come here, bend with the hands the young neck (90)
to everyone readily, even to the unwilling ’tis bent.
The manna again, a strange rain: everyone, collect
in your lap, some more, some less, the same grace!
If you want, don’t even spare God’s holy day of rest,
for it may fester in greedy hands. (95)
Common to all is air, and common is earth,
common the wide sky, and what his eyes illuminate,
common is also the bounty of the sea, common the thrones, too.
How wonderful! Not even Saul is a stranger to grace, but an oracle.

This single passage is framed by the repetition of the herald’s invitation (δεῦρ’ ἴτε, 89) and by a beloved maxim (99)[381]. Note how Gregory enhances the idea of carelessness with word choice: the repetition of πᾶσι (89; 91) and the θρόνος that is εὐρὺς (89). The concept is developed further through the biblical comparison with manna, because its similarity with rain (ξένος ὄμβρος, 92), its abundance, and its destination—all the people of Israel—express the indifference with which ordinations are distributed, while its divine provenance and its internal consistency (ἴην χάριν, 93) reflect the theological characteristics of episcopal consecration[382]. It is obviously a paradoxical employment of the usual procedure of typological interpretation, because the positive features of the biblical manna are ironically mentioned to express the absurdity of the bishops’ behaviour.

As was already mentioned, lines 96–98 feature a pagan theme, the idea of the common property (or, better, the nonproperty) of natural elements. It is one of Gregory’s oft-repeated concepts, which he probably took from Euripides and Menander, but read in light of Mt. 5:4–5 and (presumably) of the Cynic diatribe[383]. In all other Gregorian

381 For the proverb of “Saul among the prophets”, see §2.1.2.1 n. 48 and II, 1, 12, 401 (in the same context).

382 Biblical sources: εἶπεν δὲ κύριος πρὸς Μωυσῆν Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ὔω ὑμῖν ἄρτους ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Ex. 16:4); καὶ ὅταν κατέβη ἡ δρόσος ἐπὶ τὴν παρεμβολὴν νυκτός, κατέβαινεν τὸ μαννα ἐπ᾽ αὐτῆς (Num. 11:9).

383 A remote model might be Aeschyl. *Prom.* 1091–1092, but for Gregory Men. *frg.* 481, 4 K.; 531, 8 K.; 611 and Eur. *Hel.* 906 are likelier. Again, the theme is found in Plutarch *Is. et Os.* 377F, 4. Other sources

occurrences, the idea has a positive meaning, and I, 1, 9, 97–99 is particularly interesting because the common property of natural elements is brought up as a foil for the sacrament of baptism—which is also common to all[384]. That is, Gregory is applying a defence of baptism as an ironic attack on ordination, in much the same way as he applied pagan sources' attacks against baptism—this time without irony—to ordination.

A similar combination of biblical and pagan themes is found in lines 166–183:

οὐδέ τις ἔστ' ἀγαθοῖο διάκρισις, οὐδὲ κακοῖο,
Οὐ πινυτῆς πολιῆς, οὐκ ἀφραδέος νεότητος,
Οὐ μογεροῦ βιότοιο θεουδέος, οὐ μαλακοῖο.
Εἷς νόμος ἐστὶ, κάκιστον ἔχειν πλέον. Ὡς ἀπόλοιτο
Κεῖνος ἀνὴρ, ὃς πρῶτος ἀνήγαγεν ἐνθάδ' ἀλιτρούς. (170)
Αὐτῶν κόσμος ἔοι, αὐτῶν Θεὸς, ὅσσα τ' ἀρίστοις
Ἕσπεται ὑστατίοισιν ἐν ἤμασιν ἀμφιτάλαντα·
Οἱ δ' ἀγαθοὶ μογέοιεν ἐτώσια. Τοῖα δικασταῖς
Εὔαδεν ἡμετέροισι. Δίκη φυγὰς ἔνθεν ἀπέλθοι.
Ἓν δ' ἄρα πάντα πέλοι, Χριστὸς, βροτὸς, ἥλιος, ἀστὴρ, (175)
Φῶς, σκότος, ἄγγελος ἐσθλὸς, Ἑωσφόρος οὐκέτι λάμπων.
Πέτρῳ δ' ἴσα φέροιτο θεοκτόνος Ἰσκαριώτης,
Καὶ Σολύμοις ἱεροῖσιν ἀλιτροτάτη Σαμάρεια.
Ἴσα δ' ἔχοι χρυσός τε καὶ ἄργυρος, ἠδὲ σίδηρος,
Μάργαρος ὀκρυόεντι λίθῳ, πηγαῖς δὲ χαράδραι· (180)
Πάντα δ' ἅμ' ἀλλήλοισι πεφυρμένα εἰς ἓν ἄγοιτο.
Ὅς ποτ' ἔην, ὅτ' ἄκοσμος ἔην πρωτόκτιστος ὕλη,
Κόσμον ἔτ' ὠδίνουσα διακριδὸν οὐ βεβαῶτα.
(II, 1, 13, 166–183)

There is no distinction between good and evil,
nor between hoary sense and reckless youth,
nor between a grievous and devout life and an effeminate one.
One is the rule: to make much of the worst. Damn
that man, who first brought here the wicked! (170)
Let them have the world, God, and whatever
compensation awaits the good in the last days,
let the good fruitlessly toil. Such is the sentence
of our judges, and let justice be banned from here.
Let everything be the same, Christ, man, sun, star, (175)
light, shadow, a pious angel and Lucifer no more shining.
Let God-slayer Iscariot be the same as Peter,

are listed by Moreschini/Sykes 1997, 264 and Moreschini/Gallay 1985, 133, 175 connect it without further comment to the diatribe. Gregory employs the concept at I, 1, 9, 97–99; II, 1, 13, 96–98; *or.* 4, 96; 14, 25; 32, 22; 33, 9.

384 Ξυνὸς μὲν πάντεσσιν ἀὴρ, ξυνὴ δέ τε γαῖα, / Ξυνὸς δ' οὐρανὸς εὐρὺς, ἄθ' ὥρια κύκλος ἐλίσσει· / Ξυνὸν δ' ἀνθρώποισι σαόβροτον ἔπλετο λουτρόν. (I, 1, 9, 97–99); the same idea, implicitly, at *or.* 33, 9. The prose passage does not mention explicitly baptism, but the idea of the "two Adams" and of the participation in the death of Christ the Second Adam comes from Rom. 5–6 and 1Cor. 15:21–23, passages that imply a theology of baptism.

and most impious Samaria as Jerusalem most holy.
Let gold and silver be worth the same, and even iron,
a pearl and a rugged stone, fountains and ravines: (180)
let's mix up everything and treat it as the same!
Thus 'twas once, as the first-created matter was unadorned,
still delivering the unsteadily defined world.

The passage is an expansion and elaboration of its first line, 166: οὐδέ τις ἔστ' ἀγαθοῖο διάκρισις, οὐδὲ κακοῖο, denouncing the absence of a moral criterion in the community (λάος, 164). However, this time there is no irony, because Gregory is clearly decrying this moral indifference. To do so, he constantly alternates biblical and Hellenic expressions. He begins at 169–170 with a traditional curse on the πρῶτος εὑρετής[385]. At 171–172 he rewrites in epic terms of the last judgement: The expression ὑστατίοισιν ἐν ἤμασιν is an epic rewriting of the New Testament ἔσχαται ἡμέραι, with ὑστατίοισιν replacing ἐσχάταις, which is never used of time by Homer and the older, neuter word ἦμαρ[386]. Again, at line 174 he alludes to Hesiod's scene of Nemesis and Aidos fleeing the world of the Iron Age and its reprise by Aratus[387]. Hesiod (*op.* 256–261) has Justice (Δίκη) wandering the earth to check human judgements and presenting herself to Zeus to denounce crooked ones; even more significant are lines 183–201 of the *Works*, a

385 For an overview of this literary theme, with important examples from Callimachus and Euripides (authors that Gregory knew and appreciated), see Leo 1912, 152–154.

386 ἔσχαται ἡμέραι: Joh. 6:39; 40; 44; 54; 11:24; 12:48; Act. 2:15; 18; 2Tim. 3:1; Jac. 5:3 and, with a slightly different wording, Hebr. 1:2; 2Petr. 3:3. For the use of ἔσχατος: Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 699, *s.v.* ἔσχατος I. Ἀμφιτάλαντα would mean "the things *on the brink/poised* that will result for excellent people in the last days" (see, for example: ἡ ὑπὲρ τοῦτον ὁδὸς ἐπίκρημνός τε καὶ ἀμφιτάλαντος, Greg. Naz. *ep.* 4, 6; in a figured sense: Πρώτη μὲν Τριάδος καθαρὴ φύσις· αὐτὰρ ἔπειτα, / Ἀγγελική· τριτάτη δ' ἄρ' ἐγὼ βροτὸς, ἀμφιτάλαντος, I, 2, 9, 68–69). I would prefer the reading ἀντιτάλαντα given in note by the edition in the Patrologia Graeca, meaning "settlement, compensation", as in II, 2, 2, 11–12 (the only other occurrence): Τοῖα διδοῖ μερόπεσσι Θεὸς μέγας ἀντιτάλαντα, / Οἷά περ ἀνθρώποις ἐνθάδε μετρέομεν, paraphrasing ᾧ γὰρ μέτρῳ μετρεῖτε ἀντιμετρηθήσεται ὑμῖν, Lc. 6:38. In this case, ἀντιτάλαντα may be a reference to the μισθός promised in an eschatological context (for example Mt. 5:12; 6; 10:41–42).

387 The two virgins in white garments, Aidos and Nemesis, could have inspired Gregory's dream of the two virgins in shining raiments: cf. λευκοῖσιν φάρεσσι καλυψαμένα χρόα … Αἰδὼς καὶ Νέμεσις (Hesiod. *op.* 198; 200) with Δοιαί μοι δοκέεσκον ἐν εἵμασιν ἀργυρέοισι / Στράπτειν παρθενικαὶ πλησίον ἱστάμεναι (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 45, 231–232). These two virgins are said to have fled mankind to reach the Olympus during the Iron Age, which could have influenced Aratus' description of Dike fleeing mankind to reach heaven and become the constellation of *Virgo* (καὶ τότε δὴ πρὸς Ὄλυμπον ἀπὸ χθονὸς εὐρυοδείης / λευκοῖσιν φάρεσσι καλυψαμένα χρόα καλὸν / ἀθανάτων μετὰ φῦλον ἴτον προλιπόντ' ἀνθρώπους / Αἰδὼς καὶ Νέμεσις: τὰ δὲ λείψεται ἄλγεα λυγρὰ / θνητοῖς ἀνθρώποισι: κακοῦ δ' οὐκ ἔσσεται ἀλκή, Hesiod. *op.* 197–201; Καὶ τότε μισήσασα Δίκη κείνων γένος ἀνδρῶν / ἔπταθ' ὑπουρανίη, ταύτην δ' ἄρα νάσσατο χώρην, / ἧχί περ ἐννυχίη ἔτι φαίνεται ἀνθρώποισι / Παρθένος, Arat. 1, 133–136).

description of the Iron Age, with many themes Gregory borrowed: discord[388]; envy[389]; men do not dread the gods[390]; they disrespect their parents[391]; they sack each other's city[392]; there is no recognition for the good and might makes right[393]. Furthermore, lines 175–176 of II, 1, 13 are an inversion of 1Cor. 15:41, organised in couples of opposite terms (Christ-mortal, sun-star, light-shadow, angel-Satan, Peter-Judas, Jerusalem-Samaria, pearl-rock, spring-ravine), rather than in a list of different categories, so that the confusion more clearly communicates connotations of moral subversiveness[394]. The only exception to the scheme is the triplet gold-silver-iron (184), which may allude to the Myth of the Ages, already evoked in the previous lines. Finally, Gregory evokes the ultimate absence of distinction through the reference to the mythological primordial chaos. This idea enjoyed increased popularity beginning with the first century BC, as the Platonic Academy turned dogmatic; indeed, the fountainhead of this conception for Gregory is probably various interpretations of the *Timaeus*, either Jewish (Philo), Christian (Origen), or pagan (Plutarch, Albinus). This "prosaic" derivation of the theme, as opposed to archaic and Hellenistic poetic models, is demonstrated by the use of the word ὕλη (187), which is not normally found in poetic accounts[395].

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388 οὐδὲ πατὴρ παίδεσσιν ὁμοίιος οὐδέ τι παῖδες (Hesiod. *op*. 183); see Greg. Naz. II, 1, 13, 145–148; 151–153.

389 ζῆλος δ᾽ ἀνθρώποισιν ὀιζυροῖσιν ἅπασι / δυσκέλαδος κακόχαρτος ὁμαρτήσει, στυγερώπης, (Hesiod. *op*. 195–196); the theme of envy, φθόνος, is everywhere in Gregory's poems, and the epithet κακόχαρτος, twice in Hesiod, for ἔρις and ζῆλος, is never used anywhere else until Clem. Alex. *paed.* 3, 11, 75, 4 and Gregory's poetry—see in particular Τόσσος ἔρως φαέεσσιν ἐπήχλυσεν ἡμετέροισιν, / Ἣ δόξης κενεῆς, ἢ κτήσιος, ἢ φθόνος αἰνὸς, / Τηκεδανὸς, κακόχαρτος, ἐναίσιμον ἄλγος ἔχουσι! (II, 1, 13, 158–160).

390 σχέτλιοι οὐδὲ θεῶν ὄπιν εἰδότες (Hesiod. *op.* 187); see the various allusions to the Last Judgement in our poem.

391 αἶψα δὲ γηράσκοντας ἀτιμήσουσι τοκῆας: / μέμψονται δ᾽ ἄρα τοὺς χαλεποῖς βάζοντες ἔπεσσι … γηράντεσσι τοκεῦσιν ἀπὸ θρεπτήρια δοῖεν / χειροδίκαι (Hesiod. *op.* 185–186; 188–189); see Gregory's self-presentation as a father to the other bishops at II, 1, 12, 813–815.

392 ἕτερος δ᾽ ἑτέρου πόλιν ἐξαλαπάξει (Hesiod. *op.* 189); see II, 1, 12, 797–802, where the bishops play with cities and sees.

393 οὐδέ τις εὐόρκου χάρις ἔσσεται οὔτε δικαίου/ οὔτ᾽ ἀγαθοῦ, μᾶλλον δὲ κακῶν ῥεκτῆρα καὶ ὕβριν / ἀνέρες αἰνήσουσι: δίκη δ᾽ ἐν χερσί, καὶ αἰδὼς / οὐκ ἔσται, (Hesiod. *op.* 190–193); see Πρόεδρος ἡ κακία· πονείτω μηδὲ εἷς· / Κακοὶ γίνεσθε, τοῦτο συντομώτατον, / Καὶ λῷον· ἡ δὲ πρᾶξις ἴσταται νόμος (Greg. Naz. II, 1, 12, 365–367) and Οὐδέ τίς ἐστ᾽ ἀγαθοῖο διάκρισις, οὐδὲ κακοῖο … Εἷς νόμος ἐστὶ, κάκιστον ἔχειν πλέον (II, 1, 13, 166; 169).

394 Οὐ πᾶσα σὰρξ ἡ αὐτὴ σὰρξ ἀλλ᾽ ἄλλη μὲν ἀνθρώπων, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ κτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ σὰρξ πτηνῶν, ἄλλη δὲ ἰχθύων. καὶ σώματα ἐπουράνια, καὶ σώματα ἐπίγεια· ἀλλ᾽ ἑτέρα μὲν ἡ τῶν ἐπουρανίων δόξα, ἑτέρα δὲ ἡ τῶν ἐπιγείων. ἄλλη δόξα ἡλίου, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα σελήνης, καὶ ἄλλη δόξα ἀστέρων· ἀστὴρ γὰρ ἀστέρος διαφέρει ἐν δόξῃ (1Cor. 15:39–41); the initial position of Christ in Gregory's text may harken back to 1Cor 15:23 (Ἕκαστος δὲ ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ τάγματι· ἀπαρχὴ Χριστός, ἔπειτα οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ).

395 Spoerri 1959, 107–111; for ὕλη, see Tornau 2012. The idea of cosmogony as "separation", "distinction" of pre-existing, mixed and disorderly elements was in any case widespread: it may have had an archaic Greek origin (see: Kirk/Raven 1963, 32–33), it had some biblical appeal and many Near-Eastern predecessors (Gen. 1; Kirk/Raven 1963, 33–34).

It is interesting to note the oscillations between protology and eschatology: the last judgement and the negation of 1Cor 15:41 allude to Christian visions of the end of the world, whereas the curse against the πρῶτος εὑρετής, the reference to the Iron Age, and the reference to primordial chaos allude to pagan origin myths. Apparently, all these references are purely ornamental, because no unifying logic governs their mention; rather, the poet employs every reference differently. The curse against the πρῶτος εὑρετής, like the reference to Dike fleeing the world, implies historical decadence, with a previous Golden Age now lost. When the poet compares the current state of affairs with primordial chaos, he is giving the current situation connotations of an unnatural regress towards a more primitive age—implying a natural development opposite to that of historical decadence. The same idea of subversion of the order of the universe is suggested by the references to the last judgement and to 1Cor 15:41. Here, two concurrent modes of explanation are at work: on one side, the Greek model of society as an organism naturally deteriorating through time, on the other, the model of a firm hierarchy, where every change is perceived as unnatural and sacrilegious. The mentions are divided accordingly: Christian references point to the hierarchical model, whereas Greek references point to the organicist one, with the idea of primordial chaos, the only pagan idea Gregory might have seriously accepted, reinforcing the hierarchical model. Furthermore, historical decadence in the church is one of the main themes of these poems, as has already been said (see §3.1.3.1; §3.1.4.1).

The subversion of a hierarchical order, on the other hand, is the subject of the two passages exploiting biblical typology (II, 1, 13, 116–138 and 184–195):

Κήρυξ μὲν δὴ τοῖα βριήπυος. Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε
Δείδια μὲν Μωσῆος ἀγακλέος οἷον ἄκουσα,
Ὃς μοῦνος νεφέλης εἴσω Θεὸν ἔδρακεν ἄντην,
Τοὺς δ’ ἄλλους ἐκέλευσεν ὑπὸ προπόδεσσι μένοντας,
Ἁγνοτάτους ἀγνοῖσιν ἐν εἵμασι καὶ τρομέοντας (120)
Μούνης εἰσαΐειν θείης ὀπός. Οὐ γὰρ ἄμεινον
Οὐδ’ αὐτοῖς θήρεσσι πατεῖν πέδον οὐρανίοιο,
Μὴ καὶ ῥηγνυμένοισιν ὑπὸ σκοπέλοισι δαμεῖεν.
Δείδια δ’ αὖ παίδων Ἀαρὼν μόρον, οἵ ῥα θυηλὰς
Θέντες ἐπὶ ξείνοιο πυρὸς, ξείνως καὶ ὅλοντο (125)
Αὐτίκα, καὶ θυέων χῶρος θανάτοιο τελέσθη,
Καὶ παῖδές περ ἐόντες Ἀρὼν μεγάλοιο, δάμασθεν.
Ὣς δὲ καὶ Ἠλείδῃσιν ἐπέχραε λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος,
Ἠλείδαις, ὅτι μάργον ἔχον νόον. Ἦ γὰρ ἔβαλλον
Οὐχ ἱερὰς παλάμας ἱερῶν καθύπερθε λεβήτων. (130)
Οὐδὲ μὲν οὐδ’ Ἠλεὶ χόλον ἔκφυγεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸν
Οὐχ ὁσίη γαστὴρ παίδων ἐχάλεψε δίκαιον,
Καί περ ἀεὶ βρίσαντα ὀνειδείοις ἐπέεσσιν.
Εἰ δὲ τόση τοίῃσιν ἁμαρτάσι μῆνις ἔπεστιν,
Ὁσσατίης δέος ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πλεόνεσσι κακοῖσι! (135)
Καὶ σὲ, κιβωτὸν ἄνασσαν, ὃς ἥδρασε χειρὶ βεβήλῳ

Κλινομένην, θάνεν αἶψα. Θεοῦ δέ τε νηὸν ἔθηκεν
Ἄψαυστον παλάμῃσιν, ἐρείσματα τᾶκτοθι τοίχων.
. . . .
Ἦν δ’ ὅτε Μωαβίταις νηὸς μέγας οὐ βατὸς ἦεν,
Οὐδὲ μὲν Ἀμμανίτῃσιν, ἐπεὶ στρατὸν ἤκαχον ἡΰν.
Ἄλλους δ’ ὑδροφόροισιν ἐνηρίθμησεν Ἰησοῦς,
Καὶ ξυλοφορτηγοῖσιν, ἐπεί ῥά μιν ἐξαπάφησαν.
Ταῦτα κακοῖς. Λευὶ δὲ γόνον μεγάλοιο γέρηραν.
Σκηνῆς γάρ μιν ἔθηκαν ἐπουρανίης θεράποντα·
Κἀνθάδ’ ὅροι θυέων τε καὶ οὔδεος, ἠδὲ πόνοιο.
Ἄλλος γάρ τ’ ἄλλοισιν ἀνὴρ χέρας εἶχον ἐπ’ ἔργοις,
Ὅσσα τ’ ἔην νηοῖο καὶ ἔκτοθεν ἐγκονέοντες.
Κεῖνοι μὲν τοίοισι νόμοις ἀρετῆς προμάχιζον·
Ἡμεῖς δ’ αὖ κακίῃ γέρα θήκαμεν· ὢ θανάτοιο!
Τίς τάδε θρηνήσειε γόων πολύϊδρις ἀοιδός;
(II, 1, 13, 116–138; 184–195)

Thus would the herald shout. Yet I do
dread such things as I’ve heard about the glorious Moses,
who alone gazed openly in through the cloud to God
and ordered the others to remain on the foothills,
although most holy in clothes most holy and trembling
at the very sound of the divine voice. For ’twas better
even for the brutes not to step on God’s ground,
that they might be not destroyed under bursting stones.
I do dread also the end of Aaron’s sons, who, for the offerings
put on strange fire, a strange death died
and sudden, and the place of their death was sanctified.
Although the sons of the great Aaron, they were destroyed.
Thus even the Helids a baneful fate seized,
the sons of Heli, for their greedy mind. Yea, they’d lay
unholy hands on the holy kettles.
Nor did Heli escape the wrath, but even him
the ungodly belly of his sons vexed, though he was righteous
and laden with words of rebuke for them.
So, if such sins such a wrath awaits,
how much more should we dread before greater evils!
Even thee, kingly ark, he who kept thee with impure hands
from falling died forthwith. God’s temple too was made
to hands untouchable by the pillars outside the walls.
. . . .
Once the great temple was unapproachable to the Moabites
and the Ammonites, for they vexed a brave army.
Others were numbered by Joshua among the water bearers
and the wood bearers, for they had deceived him.
This for the evil, yet they honoured great Levi’s seed:
indeed, they made him servant of the heavenly tent,
and here too there were rules for victims, place and toil.

Each man laid hands on his task,
to hasten what was of the temple and outside it.
Those served under such rules of virtue,
whereas we raffle prizes for the vice: oh, death!
Is there a bard skilled enough in laments to bewail this? (195)

The first passage is the *minor* of an *a minore ad maius* argument, a logical formula codified also by Jewish scholars of the Bible as *qal w-ḥōmer*: if the breach of sacred spaces of the old covenant was so terribly punished as the Bible shows us, then how much more terribly will we bishops be punished—says Gregory—since we desecrate the sacraments of the new covenant[396]. In our case, the fact that the premise (biblical punishments) is the *minus* whereas the consequence (threatened punishments for bishops) is the *maius* is left implicit because it presumes a commonly held Christian doctrine—namely, that everything pertaining the new dispensation is much more sacred, important, and even ontologically "real" than its Old Testament type—which is only a shadow of things to come[397].

The examples chosen from the Old Testament are the archetypes of desecration and the punishment thereof, and the poet sums up the biblical text, adding epic nuances. Lines 117–119 allude to Ex. 19, where Moses enters the cloud while the Israelites stand ordered hierarchically along the mountainside. The passage is the archetype of a hierarchy grounded in purification[398], but Gregory "epicises" Moses through the adjective ἀγακλεής, an epithet for heroes in the *Iliad*[399]. The two examples that follow are less emblematic: lines 124–126 allude to Lev. 10:1–11, and lines 128–131 to 1Sam. 2:12–17; 22–25. The sons of Eli are employed as an example of lust and gluttony by Ephrem in *CN* 21, which, rather than Eli's sons, uses King Uzziah (2Chron. 26:16–23) as the archetype of profanation[400]. These examples too are paraphrased with epic language: μόρος, ὄλοντο, and λυγρὸς ὄλεθρος (10x in Homer in the same position) replace the biblical ἀπέθανον (Lev. 10:2; 1Sam. 4:11); θυηλαί the biblical θυμίαμα (Lev. 10:1); the epic-sounding patronymic Ἠλεῖδες corresponds to biblical (and prosaic) υἱοὶ/παῖδες Ἠλί (1Sam

396 Αὐτὰρ ἔγωγε / Δείδια μὲν Μωσῆος ἀγακλέος οἷον ἄκουσα … Εἰ δὲ τόση τοίῃσιν ἁμαρτάσι μῆνις ἔπεστιν, / Ὁσσατίης δέος ἐστὶν ἐπὶ πλεόνεσσι κακοῖσι! (II, 1, 13, 116–117, 134–135). The first treatment of the *a fortiori* argument is in Aristot. *top.* 114b 35–115 15; 119b 15–30; *rhet.* 1397b 10–30; as regards the Jewish scholars, see the *baraita* at the beginning of *Sifra* (https://www.sefaria.org/Sifra%2C_Braita_d'Rabbi_Yishmael?lang=bi, accessed: 06.07.2021, 17:52). *A fortiori* arguments are frequently used by Jesus in the Gospels (for example: Mt. 6:30; Lc. 11:13; Joh. 20:29; see also Rom. 5:9–10; 17; 8:32).

397 The very same line of reasoning in 2Cor. 3:6–9.

398 For the theologian: Greg. Naz. *or.* 28, 2–3; Greg. Nyss. *vit. Moys.* 23, 152–26, 166; Ephr. Syr. *hymn. fid.* 28, 8; a similar line of thought, though with different examples in *hymn. fid.* 8; for the priest in liturgy: Ambr. *off.* 50, 258; for the proper order in Paradise: Ephr. Syr. *hymn. parad.* 2, 12.

399 Hom. *Il.* 16, 738; 17, 716; 23, 529.

400 Ephr. Syr. *hymn. parad.* 3, 14; 12, 4; 15, 9–10; *hymn. fid.* 8, 10–11. On the sons of Eli in Ephrem and Gregory: §3.1.4.4.

2:12; 17; 22)[401]. Finally, Gregory mentions the two most sacred objects of Old Testament religion, the ark of the covenant and the temple (136–138). The man killed by the ark is Uzzah at 2Sam. 6:6–8, whereas the prohibition against touching the temple is nowhere to be found and is probably an extension of the prohibition against touching the tabernacle in the desert (Num. 1:51; 3:10; 38). Here, again, the language is epicised: instead of κιβωτὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ (2Sam 6:6) we read κιβωτὸν ἄνασσαν (136)[402]; instead of περιέσπασεν (2Sam. 6:6), κλινομένην (137); instead of ἀπέθανεν ἐκεῖ (2Sam. 6:7) the simple θάνεν αἶψα (137).

The second series of examples (184–195) pertains only to the temple and its orders. Lines 184–187 are a compressed paraphrase of Dtn. 23:4–5 and Jos. 9:21–23[403]. What is notable in this paraphrase is the shifting of meaning with respect to the biblical source. The two expressions ἐκκλησία κυρίου (Hebr. *qəhal-yəhwāh*) and συναγωγή (*ʿēdāh*) are rendered by Gregory as νηὸς μέγας: while the biblical terms refer to a community of people, Gregory's term points to a building. This is possible because of the meaning of ἐκκλησία as church building and with a nod to the prohibition against non-Levites (ἀλλογενής) touching the tabernacle[404]. However, the poet paraphrased these biblical texts so that, coupled with the following reference to Levitical ministry and its rules[405], the whole passage gives the impression of a meritocratic hierarchy concerned with temple service, even if the original texts on Ammonites, Moabites, and Gibeonites were concerned with the relationship of these people with Israelites in general. The last line before the *peroratio* is one of Gregory's favourite framing devices, consecrated also by the tradition of Greek poetry: Τίς τάδε θρηνήσειε γόων πολύϊδρις ἀοιδός; (195)[406].

The focus on the temple creates a nice contrast with the cosmic indifference decried at 166–183: the Jewish temple is the type of a proper hierarchy, such as the world and the church should be and, because of sin, fail to be. Furthermore, even if they do not state it explicitly, all these biblical images imply Gregory's understanding of the episcopate and of bishop selection. In fact, both when the poet insists on the purity required of Old Testament priests and when he describes temple service as a hierarchy where each has his own function, the knowledgeable reader (as no doubt Gregory's public was) understands purity as signifying superior ascetic practice and the consequent theological insight, a level of spiritual maturity only few could reach, so that by necessity the church will be stratified in a hierarchy of mediating priests and serving laymen. It also

401 Gregory employs the biblical expression in prose: *ep*. 206, 2.

402 For the poetic use of ἄνασσα: Liddell/Scott/Jones 2011, 121, *s.v.* ἄνασσα.

403 οὐκ εἰσελεύσεται Αμμανίτης καὶ Μωαβίτης εἰς ἐκκλησίαν κυρίου· … παρὰ τὸ μὴ συναντῆσαι αὐτοὺς ὑμῖν μετὰ ἄρτων καὶ ὕδατος ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ ἐκπορευομένων ὑμῶν ἐξ Αἰγύπτου (Dtn. 23:4–5) and ζήσονται καὶ ἔσονται ξυλοκόποι καὶ ὑδροφόροι πάσῃ τῇ συναγωγῇ, καθάπερ εἶπαν αὐτοῖς οἱ ἄρχοντες. καὶ συνεκάλεσεν αὐτοὺς Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Διὰ τί παρελογίσασθέ με λέγοντες … οὐ μὴ ἐκλίπῃ ἐξ ὑμῶν δοῦλος οὐδὲ ξυλοκόπος ἐμοὶ καὶ τῷ θεῷ μου (Jos. 9:21–23).

404 Lampe 1961, 432, *s.v.* ἐκκλησία N; Num. 1:51.

405 Cf. lines 188–190 with Num. 18:1–7 and the various laws of Leviticus.

406 See Prudhomme 2006, 432–43, 443–445.

helps that the same biblical *exempla* used here in relation to the institutional episcopate are employed elsewhere in Gregory's text for the endeavour of theology, so that the model through which Gregory thinks about the episcopate and and the model through which he does theology are practically the same.

3.3.2.3 Comparison

I find the competition of the two models (decadence and desecration) significant in relation to the problem of bishop selection. In II, 1, 12, desecration does not seem to play a role, and the poet concentrates on decadence, a narrative which—as we have already seen (§3.1.3.1)—justifies more stringent intellectual requirements for bishops[407]. In this context, the parallels between the episcopate and professions are appropriate. If this model of historical decadence and meritocracy is rationalistic, it still does not doubt the charismatic nature of the office—the question of how charisma would interact with inept and immoral recipients is just not treated.

Even if the rationalistic model is not wholly absent from II, 1, 13, the idea of desecration or trespass is much more prominent here. This is demonstrated in the long *narratio* of the poem (27–58), where the agent of change and disorder is Satan and his current attacks on the church are traced back to the temptation of Adam—the Christian version of the Myth of the Ages and the πρῶτος εὑρετής of sin. The structural parallels of the Myth of the Ages and Gen. 3 are in the concept of a human condition—located in the past—free from the sorrows and restraints of the present condition of mankind[408]. Both tales move from this "Golden Age" to the current existential conditions of human beings. According to this Gregorian narration, the situation has not changed ever since: Satan tempts humans and humans fall, and under this scheme the failure in selecting proper bishops must be understood. Paradoxically, by putting his narration in the context of sacred and cosmic history, Gregory robs it of its properly historical element, of its novelty; typology and example reduce the current problem to a recurring scheme.

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407 A passage alluding to desecration may be II, 1, 12, 353–354: Ταῦτ' οὐ πρόδηλος ὕβρις; οὐ βλάβη σαφής; / Τούτων ἀνέξεται τίς; ὦ μυστήριον! The word μυστήριον is interpreted by Meier 1989, 111, as a reference to 2Ts. 2:7 (τὸ γὰρ μυστήριον ἤδη ἐνεργεῖται τῆς ἀνομίας). Since the general theme of the poem is unworthy bishops and the passage from 2 Thessalonians alludes to desecration, especially of the Temple (2Ts. 2:4), the exclamation ὦ μυστήριον may be taken to mean that the unworthy prelates desecrate the church. However, my interpretation differs from Meier's: first, because there is no clear indication that ὦ μυστήριον refers specifically to Paul's μυστήριον ἀνομίας; on the contrary, Gregory speaks in terms of "damage" (βλαβή) and "abuse" (ὕβρις), since he is referring to the bishops' behaviour regarding power (see §5.2.3); moreover, the expression μυστήριον cannot refer to these "damage" and "abuse", because both are "apparent", "obvious" (πρόδηλος, σαφής). The word must be read as an answer to the question immediately before it: "who shall tolerate this?" (Τούτων ἀνέξεται τίς;). Gregory answers this (rhetorical) question with a bitterly ironic reference to religious mystery.

408 The idea of Adam introducing sin into the world is also prominent in Paul's theology, especially as expressed in Romans: Rom. 5:12–19; 1Cor. 15:21–22.

Such a vision is much closer to that expressed by Ephrem in *CN* 20 than the historical approach of II, 1, 12 would be (§3.1.3.1).

The comparison of bad elections with acts of desecration or trespass is closely linked to the idea of the charisma of office: to appoint as bishop someone unworthy constitutes defilement because the office per se is something sacred; and because the office is sacred, one can say that appointing someone unworthy constitutes defilement. In this respect, the narration of II, 1, 13 reinforces and justifies the innovative proposal of II, 1, 12, because it reassures Gregory's readers that he does not mean to deny a certain charisma inherent in ecclesiastical hierarchy when he criticises current bishops or proposes a rationalisation of the office.

However, the reduction of the historical novelty reveals a different rhetorical strategy from II, 1, 12. The iambic poem described a problem and discussed a cultural project to solve it, criticizing perceived antagonists of this project. The hexametric poem denounces the same problem, framing it from different points of view in order to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Even if II, 1, 13 still has the formal features of an oration and even if it explicitly says it aims at persuading its audience, its structure and arguments betray a different conception: persuasion cannot be intended here except in the vaguest of senses, as the communication of the urgency of the matter at hand and the pressing necessity of action[409]; but to understand more properly the content of the poem, one needs to do away with the fictional setting of a persuasive speech and to contextualise the work in the relationships Gregory maintained with influential people in Constantinople and his peers in the empire (see §1.2.2). In such a context, II, 1, 13 is an attack on those Gregory perceived as "bad bishops"—first of all, Nectarius and Maximus: the many biblical and pagan examples, as well as the irony of the herald's discourse, aim at reducing their authority, or at least making it conditional to a course of action already known by other writings of the same poet (such as II, 1, 12), while at the same time enhancing Gregory's own standing as a morally irreprehensible outsider.

Finally, the corresponding differences of metres and attitudes between II, 1, 12 and 13 are noteworthy. Against the scholarship arguing for a poor understanding of differ-

409 This is clear in a passage towards the end, introducing the final *peroratio* of the poem. Gregory implies he aimed to persuade his listeners: Εἰ μὲν δὴ πεπίθοιμεν, ὀνησόμεθ'· εἰ δὲ καλύπτοι / Μῦθον ἐμὸν πολιήν τε νέων θράσος . . . (II, 1, 13, 198–199). However, the only direct plea to the audience, in the immediately preceding lines, is very generic: Σχέσθε, φίλοι· λήξωμεν ἀτασθαλίῃ μογέοντες· / Ὀψέ ποτ' εὐαγέεσσι Θεὸς τίοιτο θυηλαῖς (II, 1, 13, 196–197). The material content of this plea is to be deduced from the term ἀτασθαλίῃ, which refers back to the moral shortcomings Gregory has highlighted in his poem; and yet no concrete course of action is suggested, so that this final exhortation is merely stating explicitly the message already implied by the sarcastic and censorious description of current behaviours in the church (if it is bad, it goes without saying that you should not do it). Furthermore, Gregory himself started the poem as more of a vent than a concrete political project (see II, 1, 13, 18–26; §1.3.2; the parallel passage at II, 1, 12, 43–47 works more as a justification of his resented tone than a declaration of intent, a function more clearly performed by II, 1, 12, 8–30).

ent genres by Gregory based on his tendency to treat the same materials in different forms and metres (§1.3.1), the differences of II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 13 are a good argument to claim that Gregory had a sophisticated understanding of genres. It is true that the two poems treat the same argument and that in them often there is one passage that paraphrases another or there are two passages that paraphrase a prose passage. This must be attributed to Gregory's working procedure, so deeply influenced by the school practice of paraphrasis, and to a conscious decision to hammer on the same themes for his political reasons. Moreover, many of Gregory's themes are new to Greek poetry, so that it is natural that they tend to oscillate between different genres. On the other side, the iambic and hexametric poems reveal a fundamentally different attitude to the same material and different procedures to contextualise and bring to fruition the same "tiles". The tradition of dramatic poetry advises iambs as the appropriate metre for writing *sermocinatio* (fictional dialogues) in the style of Cynical diatribe; this in turn is the best way to present a reasoned proposal of reform—determining Gregory's approach to criticizing the bishops in II, 1, 12. Similes were one of the main features of epic style, so that a poem trying to plot contemporary issues onto literary or natural precedents may well be written as a digressive epic, all the more so since the literary precedents come from the Bible, deemed "high" as far as subject matter goes, and also because epic allows a writer to alternate narration and discourses[410].

3.3.3 Conclusion

A comparison of Gregory's and Ephrem's texts on the theme of bishop selection reveals deep differences in approach and conceptions, differences similar to those observed for other themes and reflecting different contexts of poetic production.

Ephrem's poems deal with the problems of the local community, so that they tend to treat bishop selection ex post facto, aiming at consensus. In this, they appear archaic compared to Gregory's texts, because their problems, strategies, and conceptions are much more similar to those of second- and third-century Western authors, such as Cyprian and Origen. The great novelty of Gregory's texts in respect to his predecessors lies in a new perspective: the focus is much less the community and much more the

410 Aristotle says of Homer that he imitates serious actions by excellent men (Ἐπεὶ δὲ μιμοῦνται οἱ μιμούμενοι πράττοντας, ἀνάγκη δὲ τούτους ἢ σπουδαίους ἢ φαύλους εἶναι …, ἤτοι βελτίονας ἢ καθ' ἡμᾶς ἢ χείρονας ἢ καὶ τοιούτους … οἷον Ὅμηρος μὲν βελτίους, Κλεοφῶν δὲ ὁμοίους, Ἡγήμων δὲ ὁ Θάσιος <ὁ> τὰς παρῳδίας ποιήσας πρῶτος καὶ Νικοχάρης ὁ τὴν Δειλιάδα χείρους, Aristot. *poet.* 1448a 1–2; 5–6; 11–14, he does so sometimes in a diegetic way, sometimes mimetically (καὶ γὰρ ἐν τοῖς αὐτοῖς καὶ τὰ αὐτὰ μιμεῖσθαι ἔστιν ὁτὲ μὲν ἀπαγγέλλοντα, ἢ ἕτερόν τι γιγνόμενον ὥσπερ Ὅμηρος ποιεῖ, 1448a 20–22) and that the hexameter is particularly apt for narration and metaphors, whereas the iamb is more "practical" (τὸ γὰρ ἡρωικὸν στασιμώτατον καὶ ὀγκωδέστατον τῶν μέτρων ἐστίν (διὸ καὶ γλώττας καὶ μεταφορὰς δέχεται μάλιστα: περιττὴ γὰρ καὶ ἡ διηγηματικὴ μίμησις τῶν ἄλλων), τὸ δὲ ἰαμβεῖον καὶ τετράμετρον κινητικὰ καὶ τὸ μὲν ὀρχηστικὸν τὸ δὲ πρακτικόν, 1459b 35–37).

universal (or imperial) church. Hence, selection is no longer a problem of consensus on different social and ecclesiastical strata, but is instead a matter administered by a rather homogeneous group of people—the current bishops—with a certain influence from powerful laymen.

In this context, demands and dynamics hitherto barely considered arise, and with them new rhetorical aims and strategies become prominent: these new dynamics and discourses tend to replicate those of late antique aristocracy, in that the group of co-opting bishops disputes new selections along theological (i.e., ideological) lines as well as according to family and friendship ties. This is especially true in Gregory's poetry, because it uses the traditional weapons of *paideia* (as demonstrated by his mastery of different genres and their metres, a concern apparently lacking in Ephrem) and ties together universal aims (e.g., rationalisation of the episcopate) with partisan aims (e.g., defence of his person and attack on Nectarius and Maximus).

This context explains the main new theme found in Gregory's poetry, a theme absent from Ephrem's—namely, rationalisation. When the matter at hand is crafting consensus ex post facto for a selection ultimately in the hand of God, one should not speak of requirements or even of a choice; at best credentials may be presented as further proof of divine election, as guarantees, or as signs of charisma. But when the poet addresses a board of peers perceiving themselves as responsible for the choice, then positive features may be properly named requirements or credentials.

Closely connected with the idea of a responsible choice by the bishops is the possibility of error in this choice, which has two implications: first, if one does not want to completely forgo the charismatic nature of the office, then charisma must be located in toto in the abstraction of the office itself or in the rite of consecration, with the recipient either contributing with his personal charisma to the charisma of office or defiling the office with his unworthiness; second, the possibility of error allows for invective and infighting—though it is difficult to determine if the idea of error and responsibility arose from invective and infighting, or vice versa. Both these implications are fully played out in Gregory: the poet never doubts the efficacy of sacraments and, much to the contrary, employs their efficacy and sanctity to highlight the sacrilege perpetrated by those who administer sacraments unworthily. Error is thereby thematised under the category of sin or sacrilege and employed as material for invective; the same mechanism is at work when error is categorised as historical decadence and lack of theological preparation.

Finally, it is interesting to note how much of pagan antibaptism arguments Gregory borrows in his critique of rash consecrations. Such borrowings are nowhere to be found in Ephrem. They are likely due to the aristocratic background Gregory shared with the pagan authors he borrowed from: they all shared the same core values of Greek *paideia*—in particular, the idea that only those who have trained themselves painstakingly may reach moral excellence, which also depends upon a correct understanding of the divine. In a way, this reinforces one of the basic theses of Elm's book on Gregory

and Julian[411]—namely, that the challenge posed by *paideia* and pagan reactions to foundational Christian values (such as grace) contributed strongly to the refinement and clarification of Christian doctrine. Maybe, if we do not observe the same awareness of the complications surrounding bishop selection in Ephrem, it is partly because Ephrem experienced less pressure from elite culture to justify the selection of his community's leaders.

3.4 Conclusion

This long inquiry should have equipped us to answer this question: What is a bishop in the poems of Gregory and Ephrem? I do not mean to ask simply what Ephrem and Gregory thought of the episcopal office or what their theology says about it. The question is more particular and concrete and pertains to the meaning and form of the concept of "bishop" and of the particular bishops in the literary construction of the poems; the poets' theoretical ideas do play a role naturally, but they are just one of the many considerations that go into the composition of a poem. The addressee, the concrete situation, and the pragmatic aims of these texts were also taken into consideration by their authors, who modelled these requirements into the recognised forms of their literature.

If we had to condense Gregory's and Ephrem's theoretical models of the episcopate, which are by and large the same, we could define the bishop as the ascetic-in-chief of the community. Such a definition recognises the predominance of the theme of leadership in both poets' theology; liturgical priesthood is also present, but not so prominent. Asceticism is the other element of the definition, and it summarises the moral code Gregory and Ephrem shared, while also taking into account Gregory's emphasis on teaching. Morality and ascesis by and large coincide, with Gregory's ascesis characterised by its engaging with Scripture and its contemplative aims. Asceticism is also the requirement (for Gregory) or the sign (for Ephrem) of a good candidate to the episcopate.

Therefore, the a priori model for the bishop is something like the protagonist in the *Life of Porphyrius of Gaza* and unlike the one in the *Life of Epiphanius of Salamis*—to employ the same examples as Claudia Rapp[412]. Or, if we want to reference two more famous bishops, Ephrem's and Gregory's model is more Saint Augustine than Saint Ambrose: a bishop with an ascetic background in a community; possibly well educated, according to Gregory; preoccupied with the unity and orthodoxy of his diocese but also with their moral progress; capable of choosing worthy colleagues from among the clergy. The model of the civic bishop represented by Saint Ambrose, always engaged in charitable projects or in administering justice, a great builder of churches and finder of relics, capable of exercising *parrhesia* even before an emperor—this is nearly absent from the poems.

411 Elm 2012.
412 Rapp 2009.

Interestingly, the Ambrose/Epiphanius model corresponds well with what we know of Basil, whereas the Augustine/Porphyrius model adapts well to Gregory's own profile.

This correspondence between Gregory's profile and his model bishop is no coincidence. The discourse around the ideal bishop, which in II, 1, 12 appears so generic, is really—as I have established more than once—an apology of Gregory himself. Vice versa, apologetic and autobiographical passages attribute to Gregory the same characteristics as he attributes to his ideal bishop. This dynamic will be clearer in my analysis of II, 1, 17 in chapter §5.1.1. In the case of II, 1, 12 what appears as a reasoned proposal for the episcopate in general is really a counter aimed at the poet's critics and political adversaries in the capital. Even the definition of a specifically Christian doctrine, since such a doctrine had to be taught by bishops, is meant to locate the ideal teacher in the social space occupied by Gregory and to sharply differentiate this teacher from the social models of Gregory's competitors, Maximus and Nectarius. Furthermore, the ascetic portrayals in the four poems correspond (often verbatim) to the autobiographical passages on Gregory's own retreat from Constantinople. In II, 1, 12 the model ascetic is always contrasted to a model profligate, clearly meant as an attack to Nectarius.

This literary stance is much less prominent in II, 1, 13, where bishops and candidates for the episcopate are treated as a collective, sometimes even objectified through metonymy (ἔδος, ἔρκος, βῆμα, κιγχλίς). If II, 1, 12 and II, 1, 17 presented us with contrasting portrayals, II, 1, 13 is a grand historical painting crowded with figures and symbols. The painting also has depth and perspective thanks to its references back to sacred history and to the grandiose narration of how the church came to be after the original sin and how Satan has found a way to fight it now. Gregory introduced a historical perspective also in II, 1, 12, but with a completely different aim: if in II, 1, 12 the change from the past to the present is primarily an argument in favour of Gregory's apparently generic proposal for the episcopate, the multiple references to the past in II, 1, 13 give the impression of a long history of a collective of people (a λαός), in which the bishops appear as real-life actors in the last phases.

It also adds to this sense of reality that already at the beginning of the poem the bishops are put forth as addressees. Again, this device is found also in II, 1, 12, but there it appears only towards the end, and the bulk of the poem speaks to the stock fictive counterpart of diatribe. The fictive partner helps the speaker build the argument and anticipate objections, but the partner has no character or consistency of his own. The bishops of II, 1, 13 (as well as those of II, 1, 10), on the other hand, are at the same time addressed and described, so that they are unmistakably linked to the matter at hand. What is said is said of real, present people, though still treated as a collective and not as outright characters.

The bishop appears as an addressee also in Ephrem's poems, in particular in *CN* 17–21. Here, the poet gives voice to the community to praise the prelate. These poems are the ones that correspond most closely to the genre of the "mirror", in which one speaks to a high official (a king, for example, or a bishop) of the characteristics and duties of an ideal representative of his office, ostensibly to praise those characteristics

in the addressee but allusively to enjoin him to exhibit them. So, if the bishop described by *CN* 17–21 is nominally the addressee Abraham, in reality what is represented is an ideal image at which Abraham should aim. This process, however, is not developed rigidly: moments of Abraham's personal history are indeed told in the poems, which do not lose their link to reality. In this compromise we see the poet's ability to combine the need to express a message with an acknowledgement of the concrete situation of performance which required personalised praises for the addressee. These could, after all, function as a *captatio benevolentiae*.

Finally, *CN* 13–16 present yet another literary strategy. Here, the ideal bishop is divided, so to speak, into the three real bishops of Nisibis: Jacob, Babu, and Valgash. To give a character to each of these and to differentiate them from one another, Ephrem does not rely on the normal instruments of literary characterisation, such as the description of outward looks, direct speech from the character, or description of the inner workings of his mind. The poet is, after all, part of the picture, as he refers to himself at least once here and twice in *CN* 17–21; therefore, he cannot cast himself as omniscient narrator. Instead, each of the three bishop is allotted a set of virtues from the ideal bishop: Jacob is stern and ascetic, Babu is charitable and generous, and Valgash is meek and capable of teaching. Of these three, only Valgash is described with some depth and emerges as a longtime ascetic, sweet and maybe a bit shy, but also a capable preacher. This method results in an admittedly rigid characterisation: Ephrem seems less interested in the human substance of his bishops and more in the historical scheme their threefold succession represents. The impression is warranted by a closer reading of the poems: episcopal succession is indeed the main theme he wants to expound in these *madrāšē*, as we shall see in the next chapter.